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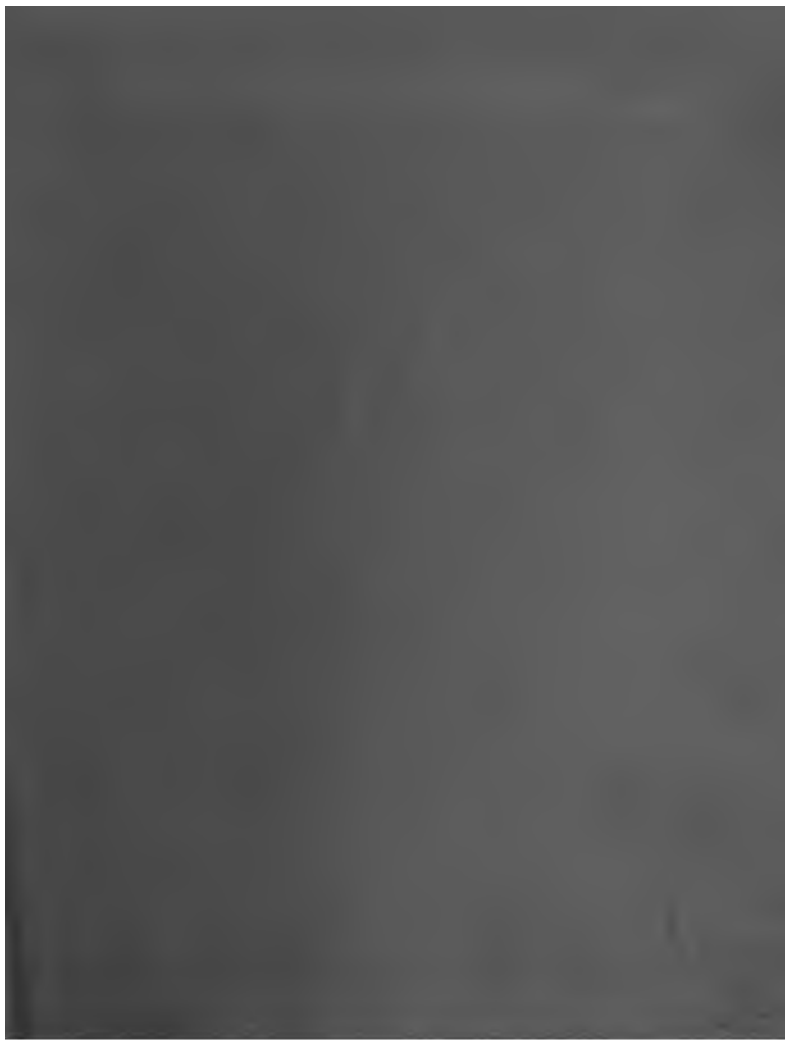
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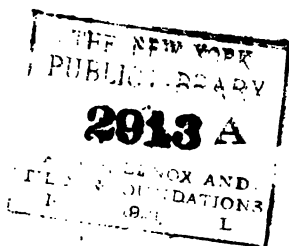


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OLD WIVES FOR NEW



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PROLOGUE

AUGUST shone hot and clear upon the hills of southern Indiana. The grain had been cut, and quail were pecking in the stubble, with a pause now and then to whistle from the gray zigzag fence. But the timothy was still standing, waist deep; the full-blown blossoms of clover, white and pink, were scenting the air; and down where the now shallow creek bustled along, over and among the stones of its rocky bed, the cornstalks were rustling like so many ladies in stiff green Sunday silk.

There was a path through the great hillside meadow. It began at the barnyard, where the thrashing machine was making the sweat pour from a score of workers, to trickle and glisten upon their sun-scorched faces and bare, hairy chests. It clove the sea of gold-tinted grass straight to an island where a clump of pear trees leveled in the western sun; thence it wound down the slope to emerge into the road along the creek bottom. On that midway island, in the shade of the pear trees, sprawled in graceful idleness a boy of seventeen, like a young corn and wine god. His eyes were full of dreams; upon his handsome features lay a faint smile of content that it was summer and the free open air, with youth frolicking through his veins, and all the world before him in the glory of its veil of illusion and hope. His carelessly roving glance spied and paused upon a pale-blue sunbonnet far away, down toward the creek fence.

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The little bonnet, so blue, so airily light, suggested quaint boat adrift upon that bright bronze sea; its cupant was a small sweet face, like a flower afloat in azure shell.

In this boy, just then somewhat tardily awakened to the sense of sex, all faces feminine aroused vague confused minglings of wonder and awe and longing now an impetuous impulse to push through the veil the temple's divine mystery, now a timid and even fearful shrinking. But he was a reader and dreamer, the boy with the quick, blue-gray eyes and the tawny skin and the splendid shock of auburn hair; thus, no soon would he look at a woman than his glance would turn impatiently away; he had compared her with some composite dream-woman, evolved from his picturing of the women who lived for him in history and in romance—Cleopatra and Aspasia, Theodora and a boy version of Messalina; the two Catherine's, she whom Florence gave to France, and she who set upon her own head the crown of great Peter's crazy, impious grandson; Dickens's Agnes, and Thackeray's Becky the woman who ran away from her master in *Second Judges*, and the burning-eyed roadside preacher, who finally taught slow Adam Bede the meaning of love. She was tall, this composite woman of the boy's dream, and she had masses of golden hair, and a white robe with a purple cord at the waist, a robe that was flowing yet clung to her figure. A proud, haughty woman, one he would be afraid to approach; yet she would somehow hearten and compel him to—to—he did not know just what; some restrained kind of worship, for he had not got so far as to venture to think of touching, of kissing her.

The tiny, pale-blue boat with its interesting pas-

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senger was floating nearer and nearer on the surface of that sea of emerald and gold. The tresses that curled between the rim of the sunbonnet and the soft, graceful contour of the small face were of the shade of ripe wheat when the sun shines on it. The eyes were blue, like his own, but a deeper, gentler blue, like the sky, as you look straight up into it when there are no clouds. It was the face of a child who was also a woman—a child waiting to be awakened with a kiss into womanhood. The boy's face had the masculine comeliness of clearness of skin and strength of line and steadiness and intelligence of gaze. The girl was beautiful with that wonderful beauty of youth—youth of the smooth, electric skin, youth of the lips like petals of a rose, youth of feeling free from the taint of thought. And now she was standing straight and slim before him—and he did not, could not, turn his gaze away. She was utterly unlike the woman of his dreams. That woman compelled him to look up, was woman the goddess. Here was woman the flower, to be plucked and worn. He was at ease with her because he felt stronger and superior.

The sun glistened upon her, upon the pale-blue sunbonnet, upon her little round chin, upon her round white throat left bare by her simple, single dress of blue like the bonnet, and evidently off the same bolt of calico. The dress came only to her elbows and to her knees. Her arms, her legs, her hands and feet were bare, and had been tinted a delicate golden brown by the sun. Slim wrists and ankles, small but rounded arms and legs, a slender, supple waist; the shoulders broad and strong—the shoulders of the woman who is the mother born.

The boy flushed and tried to look away, yet could

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not. He longed to say, "I love you!" He longed to take her in his arms strongly, and to kiss her— He blushed still more deeply, and could not even rise, but lay resting upon his elbow and gazing and blushing. The girl seemed to understand, as children do who from babyhood have been used to being looked at because of their beauty.

"I heard the pears were ripe up here," said she.

Her voice sounded in his ears like a strain of music; her words seemed full of delicious meaning, like a plain mask that hides a ravishing mystery of beauty and romance. "Pears?" said he, awkwardly. "Help yourself."

"Well, I should think so!" retorted she, with a mocking smile and a toss of the head that freed it of the sunbonnet. Her hair was not in braids down her back, but was done up in a soft roll like a crown. The boy thrilled, flushed, looked hastily away lest longing might thrust him where he would not have the courage to stay.

"My uncle owns this farm," he explained.

"But my father rents it."

"Oh! Then you are Joel Baker's daughter?"

She laughed; very white and even were her teeth, and the inside of her mouth was as rosy and fresh as her lips. "Yes, I'm Sophy Baker—the youngest of the eleven."

"My name's"—the boy, or rather, the youth, began, for he was now a youth and no longer the boy who, half a brief hour before, had stretched out there to dream.

"I know *you*," she interrupted, and she glanced at his white flannel suit, the mark of the city to the people of that region in those days.

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He was on his feet now, was gathering ripe pears from the ground, taking care to select only the ripest that were also most attractive to the eye. She seated herself where he had been lying, her legs curled up under her skirt. "My, but it's hot!" she exclaimed, tucking in her dress a little farther at the throat.

He thrilled at the remark as if it had been wondrous wise—and surely, more profound than the bottom of wisdom's deepest veil is the mere sound of the right voice at the right time. "*There you are!*" said he, holding toward her a double handful of the little pears that were as sweet as strained honey.

"Drop them," cried she, holding up her skirt to catch. "Why do you blush all the time?"

"I didn't—till I saw *you*," replied he boldly.

She was not old enough in coquetry to conceal her pleasure. "You don't mean it," said she.

He sat close to her. "Why aren't you eating?" he asked.

She buried her white teeth in the largest and ripest of the pears. The sight gave him a sensation of delight that was also pain. "*There you go again—blushing,*" cried she.

For answer, he put his arm round her, and kissed her. She frowned, blushed, laughed, pushed him away; as he kissed her again, there came into her eyes a sudden soft glow, and then she veiled them. "Go away," she said pleadingly, almost a sob in her voice. "Go away," she repeated, and from her long lashes fell two big tears. He shrank before this new revelation of the mystery feminine.

"I—I—I'm sorry," he muttered.

She was smiling through her tears. At their age the girls are bolder than the boys; she saw she had

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unduly alarmed him. "You ought to be," said she mildly. "You didn't look like that sort of a fellow." She ate a pear in silence, watching his embarrassed ashamed face. "Still—I reckon you felt just as I did," she resumed.

He glanced at her in wondering inquiry.

"As soon as I saw you, I wanted you to," she explained. As she finished one pear and took another she added, "And I never felt that way before."

"Didn't anybody ever kiss you before?" he asked hopefully.

"Lots and lots of times." When she had sufficiently enjoyed his discontent, she went on, "In games—and that don't count."

"Games?"

"Kissing games."

"Oh!" he said; but it was plain he did not understand.

"Didn't *you* ever play?"

He blushed again, this time for his own evidently dense ignorance.

"Why, where do you go to church?" cried she, amazed. Then, "Oh, I suppose you're Presbyterian or 'Piscopalian. *They* don't have kissing games at the sociables. Well, as ma says, the Presbyterians may be tonier in this world, but it's being tony in the next world that counts."

He was sensitive about words; but "tony" fell from those lips as free from taint as a new coin just dropped from the die. "No, we're Methodists," said he.

"Oh, that's all right. The Methodists are most as good as *we* are."

"Are you Baptists?"

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"Not much!" said she contemptuously. "We're Christians."

"Christians?"

"Disciples of Christ. Some"—scornfully—"call us Campbellites."

"Oh—of course."

And their conversation ended abruptly. They had but the one topic in common, and of that they dared not talk even to the limited extent which their lack of experience permitted.

"Going to stay long?" she asked, eating the last pear slowly, because when it should be finished there would be nothing between them and motionless silence.

"I *was* going home next week," replied he. "But I don't have to."

A reflective pause. Then the girl: "I'd never marry anybody but a Campbellite—I mean a Christian. I'd be afraid we'd not meet—over there."

"Will only Campbellites go to heaven?"

"I hope not. But it looks that way to pa and ma."

"We think that all denominations—even the Catholics—maybe the Jews—will go. Only there'll be different kinds of heavens."

She sighed. "If I thought that, I'd like to go to most any kind but Campbellite."

"I've never heard of a heaven that I'd change for this earth," said he audaciously.

"Sh-h!" she exclaimed—a perfunctory rebuke. "You mustn't talk that way."

"But I can't help *thinking* that way, any more than I could help—" a furious blush—"loving a Jew or—a—Campbellite."

"I like *that*!" cried she. "Putting me in with Jews."

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"But I like Jews. My best friend at home in Indianapolis is a Jew."

"I never saw a Jew—except Cohen—he's the peddler. Maybe he's a gypsy, because he has rings in his ears." She complacently smoothed the skirt of her pale blue frock. "Ma got the goods this is made of from him. And these stock—" She thrust out one slender smooth bare leg, rosy white above the line of sunburn. Her foot was small and perfectly formed. It was her turn to blush. "I forgot," she said, laughing. "I don't often go barefoot." And the foot and ankle and leg went back out of sight beneath the skirt.

"They're very brown," suggested he tactlessly.

She looked caught, tried to save herself with, "You don't know how easily I tan." And then she hastened to shift the subject by asking, "Do you go barefoot?"

"No," replied he, with embarrassment. He was afraid to confess that he had never gone barefoot; she might think he was posing as superior.

"I'll tell you what let's do." She rose to one knee, tossed her sunbonnet on her mass of hair. "Let's go wading. I know a place where the creek's deep and almost sandy at the bottom."

Both were standing now. He was a head the taller; as he looked down at her, she lowered her face until he could see only the crown of the sunbonnet. Suddenly she whisked it off, and her eyes challenged his longing. Before he could accept, "Let's race!" she cried, and was speeding down the grassy path like a fleeing nymph. He pursued, but he had no desire to overtake her. He preferred to be a few yards behind, where he could watch her as she ran, the movements of her lithe, young body, her hair frolicking and streaming in the wind. She looked back at him when they neared the creek fence.

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Her laughing eyes, her flushed cheeks— He dashed forward, caught her, for one instant had her trembling, throbbing form passive in his arms. She began to exert all her strength to free herself. At first he was afraid he would hurt her; then, as he realized how strong and supple she was, that fear gave way to a desire to conquer; and in her eyes laughing up at him, in her breath upon his cheek, in the quick pulse of her blood, he felt her desire to be conquered after a struggle—that she was resisting not to overcome but to make her happiness and his own the greater when his strength should slowly triumph over hers, and she, helpless in his arms, should yield the kiss that was the reward and the penalty.

He slipped in the tangled, trodden grass; he released her, fell, lay looking up at her. But she did not laugh and taunt him and gloat over him. Her eyes were suddenly sad, almost to tears. "If you hadn't had on shoes," said she consolingly.

He drew himself to a sitting posture. It was delightful there on the warm grass from which the sun was drawing a powerful perfume. He felt a languor out of all proportion to the exertion he had made. She perched on the top rail of the zigzag fence and busied herself tightening the loosened coil of her hair. She glanced at him; the color poured into her face, suffused her cheeks. Her fingers faltered, missed their way among her thick locks. Longing conquered his shyness and fear. He rose, put his arms round her. She did not resist.

"You'll give me the forfeit, anyway," he said.

She slowly lifted her eyes until they were gazing straight into his. "Yes," she answered softly.

He *did not kiss her*. Instead, each continued to

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gaze into the other's eyes. The blazing sun stung their vigorous young bodies; the call of the birds seemed the intense passionate cry of their hearts. Their lips met. His arms tightened about her, and she let herself slide from her perch until he was holding her. One of her arms was locked in one of his, the other was round his neck. "Sophy!" he murmured. And now they were looking gravely each at the other. She drew away, shyly began to close her dress at the throat.

"No! No!" he cried. "Sophy, I love you!" And he kissed her protesting fingers until they ceased to bar the way and were fluttering through his hair, while his lips touched her white neck, her throat, her cheeks, her lips.

"Don't!" she pleaded, her voice choked with a sob. And again the big tears glittered in her long lashes.

"I love you, Sophy. Do you love me?"

"I don't know what it is," she answered, hiding her face in his shoulder.

The fierce rapping of a yellow-hammer in the walnut tree above their heads startled them. In silence they climbed the fence, descended to the creek. The woods seemed a temple; and they, two worshipers moving along the aisle toward the altar.

"It's farther up—the place I meant," said she in the low voice people use instinctively in cathedrals.

He followed her until they came to a grassy bank overhanging a pool. "Is this it?" he asked. They were gazing each at the reflection of the other in the dark quiet water.

"Yes. You can take off your shoes and stockings in the grass here."

He sat and took them off, Sophy watching him. "*How white your feet are,*" said she.

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"Not so white as you, where the sun hasn't tanned you."

"But you're white like a woman."

"So's everybody," retorted he, not quite sure whether she meant it as a compliment, not quite sure that he liked it, even if she did.

Sophy seemed not to hear. "I thought I'd be afraid of you," she went on.

"Why?"

"They all said you were so smart."

"And you see I'm not." He laughed.

"No, not a bit. You're— I was going to say you were like the rest of the boys. But"—with a quick glance and a little color—"you're not. No, you're not a bit like them. I'd do anything you said. I guess you *are* smart. I'm afraid you'll— You see, I ain't a bit smart, not even at baking and doing housework."

"Sophy!" He wasn't listening to what she was saying. He had been drawn close to her by the note in her voice that seemed to be drawing him to her. His arms went round her. "You're so beautiful, Sophy."

"I'm glad you think so. Everybody always said I was. You won't mind because I'm not smart?"

"But you are!" he cried. "And—if you weren't—" He finished with a kiss. They sat down on the edge of the bank and trailed their feet in the water. And after a while he rolled up his trousers, she twisted in the folds of her skirt, and they waded. The bottom of the creek was gravel rather than sand, and the sharp stones bruised his feet. But the coolness of the water, the sense of freedom, and of her nearness— Watching the water just miss the edge of her skirts, he did not in the least mind the bruises. There were great flat stones in the *bottom of the pool*, with crawfish under them and

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now and then a big minnow. She tucked her skirts close round her legs and pinned them; he rolled his trousers far above his knees and his sleeves to his shoulders. They waded and splashed and turned stones; they chased and caught and gingerly lifted the awkward, squirming crawfish. And the sun slowly descended until it was streaming great level shafts of gentle golden light through the foliage.

"My, but it must be late!" exclaimed she.

He glanced at the sun. "About four o'clock, I guess." Then the idea of separation came like a sudden falling of dusk. "That's not late."

"I *must* go home," sighed she, her sweet face overcast.

They sat on the bank again. He unwound the strip of gray silk that served him as a belt. "Let me dry your feet," said he. She held up one long slim leg and he drew the silk over it softly, lingeringly. "What pretty feet you have!"

She turned her arched foot sideways and glanced at it critically. "Most feet are so ugly," said she. Then she added: "But not yours."

"Oh, they'll do," replied he, busy now with her other foot. When he had finished, he bent and kissed her instep. "May I come to see you after supper?" he asked. "It's only a little ways from my uncle's to your house."

"Not to-night. We've got the harvest hands, and I have to work till bedtime. Pa don't allow anybody to sit up after he goes to bed."

"Then—to-morrow?"

"Yes—to-morrow." She sighed. "That seems a long way off, don't it?"

"Couldn't I come to-night?"

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"No—you mustn't." She seemed very young, childish, again. "You don't know how strict father is. I'll catch it for staying away this long."

"To-morrow."

"Up by the pear trees. I can come about nine, I reckon. But not for long. When did you say you were going away?"

"I don't know. I don't have to go back to school for——"

"Oh, do you still go to school?"

"Yes—years yet."

"Ain't that dreadful!"

"Oh, I don't mind."

"That's so. You're smart. Are you going to be a preacher?"

"Mother wants me to. But I——"

"You'd better be. It's a nice business. You sit round dressed up all the time. And when you come, everybody's glad, and they kill the best chickens, and have everything good to eat." Her eyes sparkled, her rosy lips seemed rosier, her white, sharp teeth whiter and sharper. "Yes, I'd like you to be a preacher."

"I thought I'd be a lawyer."

"That's nice, too. You weren't made to work. Smart people never do. I've noticed that. They make other people work and give them the money."

She stood up. He looked at her. On a swift impulse, he rose to his knees, caught her round the waist. "How pretty you are!" he cried, kissing her waist, her bare forearms, the palms of the restraining hands she laid upon his face. "How beautiful!"

"Don't," she murmured, crimson. "You make me feel—ashamed."

"Ashamed!" he exclaimed. "Sophy——"

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"No—not just that," she interrupted. "I don't know what it is." She hid her face in her bended arm and turned away. He kissed the nape of her neck. She sank back against him. "I don't know what makes me feel so queer. I guess it must be—" She hesitated.

"Love," he murmured. "Love!"

"Love," she repeated dreamily. And a light, as from a new sun upon a new world, came into her eyes.

"I love you, I love you!" he cried passionately.

She touched his cheeks tenderly with her slim fingers. "I love you," she said.

When she drew away again, it was to start resolutely along the road homeward. She turned to say, "I'm going to make pa send me to school some more."

"Let me walk home with you, Sophy."

"No, you mustn't. If pa knew what I'd been up to— My, how mad he'd be!" Her eyes were dancing. She nodded gayly to him, and went, swinging the sun-bonnet by its strings, and walking with a natural, graceful rhythm. "To-morrow," she called at the turn of the road. "Don't forget!" At that they both laughed, so light-hearted were they. And soon he heard her voice singing.

As he went up the hill toward his uncle's house, the whole world seemed changed—transfigured. And suddenly he felt enormously hungry. "I do hope supper's ready," he said to himself.

He was surprised to find everything at his uncle's just as it used to be, just as it was when he, a boy, wandered down to the pear trees, not to return until he had become a man. At all ages we—necessarily—reckon the importance of the things of the universe as they are related to us. Perspective must be personal. Years had passed over him—what is time but measure of event?—

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years had passed over him since he last saw that big white house with its green shutters, with its pillared porch in front, and the long grape arbor at the back where they ate in summer, the chickens passing in and out, chirping and clucking. The lightning rod still glittered in newness above the roof, and at the back the preparations for the evening meal for the family and the "hands," which had been under way when he left, were only just completed.

He was hopeful, yet afraid, too, that they would observe the change in him. There was no reason for secrecy. To love the daughter of prosperous Joel Baker, owner of many hundred acres, and so shrewd a manager and so good a worker of his wife and sons and daughters and outside help, both male and female, that he was renter of many hundreds more—to love Sophy Baker would not rouse opposition at his uncle's or at home in Indianapolis. He was proud of his new and mighty sensations, of his discovery that there was in matter a soul, tangible, alive, no vague unreality like the soul that was part of religion. But somehow he could not talk of these things, though he was bursting with them; they seemed the secrets of a sacred order of which he had taken the vows.

At sight of his cousin Ellen, carrying a huge glass pitcher of milk to the table to set it between a vast platter of corn bread and a vaster platter heaped high with fried chicken—at sight of her, similar in figure and in coloring to the wonderful being who had evoked the resolute, passionate spirit of manhood within him, he felt the blood rush to his heart, then in mad torrent to his brain. On his face was again the sweet sting of *her* soft hesitating kisses. He looked round, fearful lest he had been observed. But the men—his uncle with a great

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beard like a prophet's, his big, hulking, husky cousin and the eighteen slouching, awkward harvest hands—had eyes for the table only. The women—his aunt with the sweet, tired face and the air of refinement that made his uncle still in awe of her after thirty years of the most practical married life, the four handsome hearty girls who were his cousins, and the three women from neighboring farms called in to help—the women were too intent upon the wants of those twenty-one vast appetites to note the faint outward signs of enormous inward perturbation in “that youngest boy of Joe Muddock's—Joe that went away to Indianapolis and got elected judge.”

Next to work, there is no inspirer of appetite like the example of a horde of hungry workers. The bees were still busy among the grapes overhead; a wasp or a mud-dauber flew in and darted out, now and then; the evening song of the birds filtered down through the broad leaves of the vines like the voice of the wine locked away in the round, ripe, rich blue grapes. But none of those ravenously hungry eaters spoke; wrestling with the great emotions, the great appetites, man is always silent.

When all had eaten until they could eat no more, his uncle coughed loudly and stood. They knew the meaning of that signal and pushed back their chairs and stood also. Then the old farmer said grace, ending with a tremendous amen that made the birds whose nests were in the eaves just above the arbor dart from home and flap away with cries of alarm. In those regions and in those days, endless were the developments of individuality about its one opportunity—religion. Everyone else said grace before meals; his uncle insisted that after the meal was the proper, the only time, that it was insincere,

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not to say impious, to give thanks in advance of the benefit. While grace was saying, the young man's eyes had been roving. Through a break in the leafy wall he saw a house far away across the valleys. It was white like his uncle's, and almost as large. The setting sun was reflecting from its windows in a glory of rosy golden fire.

"Whose house is that—on the crest of the second hill to the east?" he asked his cousin Amanda, in the pause after his uncle's thunderous amen.

"Joel Baker's. He's an old crank. But you ought to see his daughter Sophy. My, she's a beauty. She knows it, and she's got a selfish disposition and an empty head, and is as lazy as the law allows. But the men don't mind that."

"To hear you, I'd think she'd stole your beau," said young Murdock shrewdly.

Amanda laughed disagreeably. "How'd you guess, Charles?" Then, with a shrug of her fine shoulders, "I didn't really care for him or you can bet she'd not have got him away. And what I said was so, even if it was spiteful. It takes a mighty foolish woman to lie about another woman to a man. What's the use lying, when there's always so much to tell that's true? Wait till you see her. She's not a bit your style. She don't know a thing, except how to stir up the boys."

A sharp, shooting pang of jealousy. He watched those flaming windows till they grew dark, watched the house till it faded into the black of the night. And all the time he was seeing her as plainly as if she were before his eyes, was feeling her as thrillingly as if her bosom were fluttering against his chest like the soft smooth wings of a white bird, soft yet firm white wings, crimson at their arches.

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The night was hot and close; yet the sky was clear and he thought he had never seen so many stars. Instead of going to bed, he crept down the stairs and out by the unlocked back door. On cots under the wood shed near the house the harvest hands were sleeping noisily. He went through the garden gate and across the potato patch, and the melon patch, and through the orchard—keeping due east, where he knew her house was. He skirted the dark wood of the first hollow, followed the road to the brickkilns until he came to the bridge over the creek above the fall.

“Yes, *that* was what I came for,” he said to himself, turning aside to go along the bank of the creek. The trees were thick overhead now, and the air was moist and cool. There was something beautiful and friendly in the shapes that seemed to peer from the deep dusk on either side—the dusk not so deep that he could not clearly make out the creek foaming along as if practicing for the joyous abandon of its approaching tumble of half a hundred feet. He descended, moss under his feet, thickets of fern about him. Soon he was at the pool beneath the falls, the pool into which the creek leaped with a musical shout that drowned every other sound. He was seeking the ledge where one could stand and be showered and drenched by full half the mass of falling water. He had just reached the outer edge of the long flat stone, was still several yards away from even the spray of the waterfall, when he drew back with a sharp exclamation. Some one was there before him.

It was so dark that at first he could see only a swaying elusive outline. As his eyes strained and stretched to take in every particle of the light, he saw, as in a clouded mirror, the whole figure. “Sophy!” he exclaimed under his breath.

PROLOGUE

His eyes devoured that misty vision of a water sprite, and fair and unearthly, the spirit of the cascade. When he came to himself; and, white and shaking, as if he had seen a ghost, he fled up the road he had descended. When he reached the bridge again, he sat on its rail and waited, the noise of his rushing blood mingled with the noise of the rushing water. After a long time, when the moon was sailing high above the treetops, was shining full upon him, he saw a movement at the entrance to the path. He stood, turned so that his face was clear in the moonlight. Her figure advanced out of the darkness. He went forward.

"Is it you, Sophy?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, her hand on her heart. "I thought I was dreaming—or that—that you had died and had come to say good-by." She clung to him, sobbing.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I was down to the fall," she explained. "It was so hot, and I couldn't sleep. I don't know what's the matter with me. I feel so queer. I'm happy and sad, both at once. I sing a while, then I burst out crying—and I'm sad as I sing and happy as I cry."

She was gazing up at him, a wistful look in her azure eyes that shone in such splendor in the moonlight. He pushed off the cap that bound her hair. A shower of silvery gold suddenly enveloped her shoulders. "Oh, Sophy! Sophy! I love you!" he cried, and he buried his face in her hair, and through its soft veil kissed her cool, magnetic skin.

"I love you," she echoed softly. And she kissed him passionately.

"Will you marry me, Sophy?"

"Why, of course," she answered. "What else can

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we do but get married? I couldn't think of anything but being your wife."

The word "wife" thrilled him so that he trembled from head to foot. Oh, youth of fire and passion, you that has the strength and the courage and the innocence to feel! "My wife," he said, and repeated, "My wife. That word meant all this beauty his, forever his, forever to shine clear and bright as a sunset planet upon his life forever to burn in his veins, inspiring him to do and dare everything, anything, to fulfill all the audacities of his daydreams.

"I felt it'd be that way as soon as I heard of you," she went on. "My sister saw you the day you came and she said you were different from the boys round here. And I thought you were the one I was waiting for. Often, the last year or two, I've waked up with a start because in a dream somebody had called 'Sophy, I love you!' and kissed me. But I never could make out what he looked like. It was you—I *know* it was. I went to sleep as soon as ever I got into bed to-night. And it was you, plain as now, that woke me up."

"With a kiss?"

"With a kiss."

"Like this?" And their lips met.

They drew apart, hot yet shivering. "Sophy! Sophy!" he murmured.

"I was afraid, when I saw you at first to-day," she went on. "You looked so—so smart—as if you were full of the big books they say you read all the time. Then—there's a spark comes in your eyes when you look at me— Yes, I see it plain. It's like a little—a little star—only it seems to burn out at me—burn into me. I saw it the first time you looked at me up there in the meadow, and I didn't feel a bit afraid. I don't need to

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know anything. You know enough for us both, don't you?"

"You know how to make me— I burn whenever I look at you, Sophy. And I feel so bold, and so afraid, too."

"When I stood out under the water to-night—down there—and it came tumbling down on me and seemed to take hold of me everywhere— It was like you. It was fierce, but soft, too. And I called out your name."

"Just as the moon rose?"

She glanced quickly at him, hid her face in her hands.

He drew her closer to him. "Aren't you mine, Sophy—all mine?"

In the dusk before dawn he went with her to the gate at the end of the grove of cedars before her father's house. In the shadow of the great lilac bushes there, they lingered until the loud, hoarse salute of the roosters to the new day startled them apart, sent her hurrying into the house, sent him off toward home, marching proudly erect. To those born with that in them which had looked from his eyes since babyhood, life is no network of casual paths; it is a definite road along which they press steadily from purpose to purpose. He had entered its first stretch; he had his first purpose; he had begun to live.

I

THE AWAKENING

EVERY American city and large town now has its newly built district, where live the families thrust up into affluence because their bread winners had the sagacity or the slyness to be among the lions in the dividing of the last quarter century's unwieldy riches through the sudden development of the sciences and the swift multiplying of the population. In middle western Saint Christopher—"Saint X," as it is always called to save breath and time—this newly built district for the newly rich is on the bluffs that in winter frown and in summer smile down upon the city. Parts of it—the Whitney castle at Point Helen, for example, or the vast rambling Eyrie of John Dumont—are grandiose, indeed. Most of it is the more or less luxurious country places of families of smaller incomes or of less advanced "culture."

It is one of these—a square, brick house trimmed with Indiana limestone—that we enter just as the waitress parlor maid, capless and with none too clean apron over none too fresh black dress, sends the tintinnabulations of the dinner bell resounding out upon the verandas and up the well through which the front stairway ascends. As the sound dies away a boy, in fashionable summer dinner suit of gray well off the black, rises from a hammock on the front veranda. He leans upon the *railing*, looks down the grassy slope toward the there

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not-distant edge of the bluffs—toward a summer house where a girl a year or so older than he sits gazing out over the river, absorbed in evening dreams.

“Norma! . . . Norma! . . . Nor-ma! . . . Norma Murdock!”

The girl sighs, rises, turns. None could deny her beauty; the critical would add the unpleasant but undeniable truth that it was of the sort likely soon to be eclipsed behind the homeliness of fat unless guarded as carefully and intelligently as one must guard any other of the winged treasures of life. But, standing there in the seductive glory of her just seventeen years, she was exquisite. “What is it, Charley?” she called.

“Dinner! Stop dreaming about Joe Degarmo, and come in and feed!”

She colored, laughed, gathered in the trailing skirt she was not yet expert at managing, came running up the path—and her run was not the awkward, cowlike gait of the old-fashioned girl who never ran when she could walk and never walked when she could ride; it was, on the contrary, as graceful a dash as her handsome athletic brother could make. When she stood beside him in the broad entrance, he surveyed her with patronizing approval. “Gad, Norma,” said he, “it does you good to be in love. You certainly are about the prettiest ever. You’re a dead ringer for the picture of mother when she was your age.”

As he made this remark the door to the left opened and there appeared a youngish man in an unassuming business suit. There was a sprinkle of gray in his rather fair, slightly waving hair, quite a streak of it at his left temple; it strengthened the impression of youth because it framed an unwrinkled face and clear and ardent eyes. *In the mouth—its firmness, its lines of will*

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and achievement—experience was more distinctly hinted. A typical American face—resourceful, courageous, self-reliant; the relentless pursuit of the fixed purpose, mitigated by kindness and the saving sense of humor.

“Isn’t she, father?” said the boy, appealing to him. The boy was evidently the son of the man—a superficial copy of a masterly original.

Murdock came out of his abstraction, looked at his daughter with a fascinating lighting up of the keen gray eyes that made him seem even younger. “Isn’t she—what?”

“Like that picture of mother taken at her age.”

The smile vanished; he scanned his daughter, face and form, narrowly, anxiously. “Very,” replied he curtly and coldly. Then as the two stared at him and at each other in astonishment, he added in his ordinary calm, rather indolent voice, “Where’s your mother?”

“Here I am,” came from the head of the stairs in a slow, plaintive tone with a note of vague discontent in it, but withal musical, sweet, youthful.

There descended toward them a woman whose appearance was a somehow irritating disappointment of the expectations raised by the voice. She was young, was in a way handsome even. But there was an unyouthful breadth to her cheeks, to her bosom, to her arms and hips, a distinctly elderly caution and ponderousness of step. It was instantly apparent that this was because feet and ankles were far too small for body. In fact, her feet and her hands, her wrists and ankles, slender, delicate, in themselves most attractive, had a suggestion of abnormality, so out of proportion to her body were they. It was unpleasant, almost painful, to recognize this portly and sedate person, in rustling, much-trimmed black silk, as the lithe embodiment of youth and love who

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fitted through the odorous shadows of Joel Baker's lilacs. The lines of grace and symmetry were still there, though woefully obscured; and in a setting of features less heavy the eyes, young and soft and azure, would still have been glorious. It being particularly difficult for a "sizable" woman to array herself becomingly, Mrs. Murdock, slowly descending, looked more bulky than she really was, and uncomfortable and dressed up, to boot. The beaded trimming about her shoulders seemed to stoop them; the heavy, rich black silk was of the kind that makes the dresses that will stand alone, the kind that used to be regarded as the last word upon elegance, the necessary "best dress" of the married woman of the prosperous class. Her abundant hair was primly sleeked and gathered in a heavy shiny roll at the back of her head. In the contrast between her appearance—her dress, air, look out of the eyes—and that of the other three members of the family, there was at once a continuation and an explanation of the queer commingling of old-fashioned farmhouse crudity and new-fashioned costly luxury that met the eye on every side within the house.

The impatient children rushed on into the dining room with its country painter's frescoings and its costly rosewood furniture. Murdock waited at the foot of the stairway. If there had chanced to be with him some man friend who had not seen Sophy since her wedding day and had never happened to note how often the charms of a bride hardly outwear her trousseau, he would have found it difficult to believe Murdock's expression of simple waiting not a veil for chagrin, perhaps anger. However gradual these changes might have been, how could even a husband's partial eyes readjust to them without acute *distress, recurring each time he saw again?* No

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more years had elapsed for the one than for the other. If her life had been by chance hard, had not his life been one of incessant toil? Why then the changes in him all for the better, the changes in her all the other way?

When her slow pace had brought her almost down, he said: "How are you this evening, Sophy? Better?"

"The headache a little better," replied she. "But the neuralgia's worse. Nobody ever will know what I'm suffering. But then I'm used to it. Women were made to suffer, I suppose."

"You certainly have had a hard time ever since the beginning of last winter." His manner perhaps suggested that his was the somewhat mechanical sympathy of those whose sympathy has been heavily overdrafted.

"Last winter!" cried she angrily. "You know very well I've never had a single really comfortable day since Charley was born—I might say since Norma. But then what can a woman expect? How can a man appreciate what she goes through in carrying children and bringing them into the world?"

Murdock seemed as abashed by this the thousandth reminder, at least, of the horrors of maternity as he had been the first time it had put him down; for, the woman who uses this weapon always contrives to poison its barbs with the intimation that the man was wholly, deliberately and wickedly to blame for those horrors, and could hardly atone by lifelong contrition on his knees.

Sophy was of those classified by the casual as "good-natured" because of the widespread delusion about the relationship between girth and good nature. Indeed, until the previous winter she had not been bad-tempered. But then the long gathering punishment for her indolent and self-indulgent mode of life had tardily begun; and

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now the drooping corners of her mouth and the line of temper above her straight delicate nose were surer indications of her character than her generous expanses—or even than the sweet, low voice with its note of plaintive meekness.

A woman of the familiar type familiarly known as “settled.” Plainly, she regarded her life as past its climax; and the stage of physical and mental deterioration, indicated in slovenly corpulence, in carelessness of toilet, in stale, monotonous expression of eyes, proclaimed that she had been of this mind for some time, several years at least. Indeed, she bore suspicious resemblance to those not rare women to whom the matrimonial altar is the topmost tip of feminine ambition, is the high-water mark up to which the tide of feminine life flows ever fuller and beyond which it abruptly ebbs. To glance from her to her husband was to have the impulse to commiserate them both—and to wonder. For, it was as obvious as her having ceased to live and having begun a long placid death of the dry rot that the man to whom she was married stood just at the beginning of the age of achievement.

The conquests of active life, peace no less than war, rest chiefly upon youth’s cardinal quality, audacity, and little upon intellect. The intellectual achievements, the consolidating of what youth’s daring has won into solid structure of power, do not begin until forty or thereabouts; for then the mind enters its period of greatest dexterity and strength, the judgment is formed, the ambitions and appetites are at their most clamorous. With a yokemate who was not a helpmate, with a partner who was not a companion, with a wife who could neither appeal to nor appease the gorgeously imaginative passions that flamed for *Sophy*, slim sprite of the fields

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and the waters, Charles Murdock was entering life's golden age.

As soon as this family of four was at table, the boy began upon his sister again: "And Joe old enough to be your father!"

"I want a husband," retorted the girl, "not a child to raise. I can't bear little boys—except you, Charley. They're so silly and ignorant."

"What an unnatural child you are, Norma!" rebuked her mother. "Wherever did you get such ideas? And you with your first long skirt—I let you have that only because it didn't seem proper for a girl in short dresses to be engaged. But young people ought to be young. When your father and I were young we didn't act like grown-up people."

"Why, father's still young," cried Charles Junior, with the brutality of the tactless boy.

A flush overspread the faces of both the husband and the wife. The husband hung his head in apologetic silence; the wife burst out: "You know your father's several years older than I am." As she spoke she glanced at him and felt moved to add still more crossly: "Oh, I admit I don't look young any more. That's the curse of being a woman. The woman has all the heavy burden of care and suffering and anxiety, and it wears her out." Her eyes flared somberly at her husband; his expression of discomfort deepened.

"Pity about you, mother," teased her son.

"Charles!" exclaimed Sophy in sharp appeal to her husband. "Do you sit silent and let your son talk this way to his mother?"

Murdock came out of pretended abstraction. "What was it, Sophy?" asked he. "I didn't hear. I was *thinking* about—business matters."

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"Of course!" said Mrs. Murdock, in resigned disgust. "It seems to me a man might leave his business when he comes home to his family. It sets the children such a bad example. No wonder they fail in proper respect to me."

"I'm very sorry." Murdock's tone was contrite, out of all proportion to the apparent seriousness of the incident; Sophy and the children were astonished and showed it.

"We were talking about Joe Degarmo," explained Charley to Charles. "I was telling Norma she ought to be ashamed of herself to get engaged to a man who looks older than you do."

"There you go again!" cried his mother. "Will you stop him, or won't you, father?"

At the word "father" Norma and the boy burst out laughing. "It does sound queer—especially just now—for you to call the governor by such a venerable name," said the boy. "Why, Norma'll have to call her Joe grand-daddy."

Sophy tossed her head and pursed her lips. "I've been opposed to this engagement from the first," declared she. "It's indecent—yes, indecent. A husband and a wife should be near an age, and should get old together."

"Stay young together," suggested Norma dreamily.

"No!" retorted her mother. "It isn't proper for the heads of a family to act and look like children."

Norma's lips closed firmly to press back the eager retort. Sophy went on: "I don't know what the world's coming to. Everything your father and I were brought up to respect is being laughed at and despised. They call it improvement, but I say it's the road to ruin. What's this, Mary?—Washington pie? Oh, dear!

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Didn't I tell you to tell the cook not to have these things any more? They're so fattening"—crossly—"and she knows I can't resist."

Mrs. Murdock helped herself liberally to the Washington pie, her eyes eager, her mouth petulant. Charley winked at his sister; she frowned at him. Both glanced at their father. He was gazing at his wife, and he continued to gaze as she ate the Washington pie in silence and content. His expression was so strange a mixture of amusement and some other emotion, not definable but quite different, that Norma, the observant, felt a queer sensation at the heart. Presently he lowered his eyes and resumed his usual abstraction.

Charley happened to observe the waitress. As soon as she withdrew he said: "Lizzie's serving without her cap again. And she looks mussy and frowzy."

"You'd better mind your own business, young man," retorted his mother. "How can I see to every little thing when I'm nearly crazy with pain?"

"I wasn't thinking of you, mother," protested Charley. "I was blaming the housekeeper."

"Mrs. Theron has been busy waiting on me."

"She's n. g.," insisted the boy. "I've been home only three days, but I've found that out. The house is almost as bad as before you hired her."

"I never heard of such impudence!" cried Sophy. "Next thing you'll be criticising the food, and——"

"It is pretty bum," said he. "Ain't it, Norma?"

"Do shut up!" exclaimed Norma.

"Everybody, except my own family," pursued Sophy, "admits I'm about the best housekeeper in Saint X. Mrs. Theron does what I tell her to do. As she often says, she never began to learn how to keep house till she came here and saw how I did it."

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"She's a worthless old toady."

"If you can't behave yourself," interrupted Murdock sternly, "you'll have to leave the dining room. We've had nothing but bickerings at this table since you came home."

"Please don't correct the boy so harshly," said Sophy plaintively. "Never rebuke temper in temper, mother used to say."

A long silence; then Charley asked Norma, "When does Joe get back?"

"To-morrow, I think," replied she.

"Do have some of the pie, Norma," urged he. "Don't be afraid of your precious complexion."

"No, thank you."

"Well, I will—or mother'll take it all." And he laughed alone and boisterously at his joke. Sophy bridled, but did not again call upon her husband.

After dinner he immediately withdrew to the library. In a few minutes Norma came seeking him, found him at the farthest of the three long French windows giving on the veranda and commanding a wide sweep of hills and valleys and sinuous river. At the sound of her rustling, he turned, a frown added to his sternness or rather somberness from his interrupted thoughts. Her timidity—he was in the mood to note everything—sent a sharp pang through him. "Why do you look at me like that?" he said, direct and unconsciously peremptory.

She shrank—not so much through actual fear, for she was not afraid of him, as through that feeling of diffidence which men long accustomed to successful sway over their fellows cannot but inspire, even in each other.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed. "I—I—" He could not explain; so he added: "Please tell me

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why you looked at me like—" He was smiling now—that winning, youthful smile of his.

"Like what?" asked Norma, confused by this new manner.

"As if you were afraid I'd eat you alive." And he laughed boyishly.

"You—you always make everybody feel afraid—like a—a—" She glanced up at him, her eyes wavering between his haughty but graceful rather than harsh Roman nose and his thick, clean and vital-looking fair hair, one lock of which hung stubbornly down upon his brow. She burst into smiles—"a lion that's condescending to be sociable, but may change his mind at any moment."

He reflected her amusement, not wholly losing his first expression of wistfulness. "But I never did change my mind, did I?"

"No—and I know you won't. But— Somehow— Well, you make people look to their ps and qs. Oh, I like it," she hastened to explain. "As Joe says, it's your mark of superiority—the sign you belong to the aristocracy of men. And they all say you were that way, even as a boy."

A sad satirical smile played over his features. He was remembering that, even as a boy, he had never had real friends, equal friends, only followers. He could not see that he had ever done anything, as boy or man, to make his fellows afraid, to put himself aloof—and, indeed, he had not. His thoughts came back to his daughter. "Well—what do you want?" inquired he, good-humoredly.

She stood beside him in the window and looked up at him remorsefully. "I never do come except when I want something, do I?"

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"Naturally not," replied he. And he excused her to herself, and to himself, with "A busy man soon gets everyone into the habit of letting him alone when they've no business with him."

He saw that she was turning on her finger a ring set with two huge stones, a diamond and a pearl. "Is there nothing in the world but business?" she asked softly, her eyes down—and upon her ring.

His expression of sadness deepened. He stood in one of his frequent attitudes—hands crossed behind his back, head a little to one side and forward, eyes piercing into the horizon, lips slightly compressed, the powerful muscles of his jaw contracting nervously. After a heavy silence, he made an impatient gesture, like a man exorcising a phantom or phantoms of folly. "What did you want?" he repeated. "Was it about the Dumont place?"

"Yes," she confessed, with evident nervousness.

"You wish me to buy it?"

"Yes."

"What does your mother say?"

That released Norma's tongue. "She says she's too far along to undertake the care of such a great place. That's perfectly ridiculous. Why, she's younger than Joe—and the same age as Mrs. Berkeley, who's always being taken for twenty-five. Yet she says she belongs to a different generation from what we do. She says in her day it wasn't respectable not to settle down. She seems to think it's a crime for a woman to have her looks or her figure five years after she's married."

A queer look flitted across Murdock's face, and fled.

Norma, feeling she had said too much, ended with, "I don't think we ought to encourage her to give in

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to age before it has hardly so much as glanced in his direction."

Murdock abruptly changed the subject. "When do you and Joe marry?"

"Not for ages! Not for eighteen months, at least I must come out first. And I did so want to have the Dumont house to come out in. The caretaker let me look it over the other day. There are six rooms on the ground floor that can be thrown into one, practically."

"I'll get the house, if Mrs. Scarborough will let me have it at a reasonable figure," interrupted Murdock. "And when you and Joe marry—if he doesn't die of old age before the eighteen months—the 'ages'—are up—why, I'll give it to you as a wedding present. Does that content you?"

She turned impulsively and, her face radiant, was about to throw herself into his arms. Never had he seen her so startlingly like the picture of her mother as bride. Murdock drew back. "Norma!" he cried sharply, in his eyes the terror of one who sees the ghosts that none disputes—the ghosts from the graves of memory.

She clasped her hands. "What is it?" she gasped. "What did I do?"

He shook his head impatiently. "Nothing—nothing," he said. And he put a hand on each of her shoulders, gazed into her eyes with a tenderness and pity that moved her almost to tears. "You're very fond of Joe?" he asked.

"I love him," she replied simply.

Murdock kissed her. She thought there were tears in his eyes. "Tell your mother you'll take care of the new house now, and relieve her of it altogether

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when you marry." He kissed her again, his expression sad and cynical and tender. "Be happy, child. Youth is brief and joy is fleet." Then, repentantly, "I was only joking. Of course you—you and Joe—will be happy—ages!"

He turned away, thus indicating that she was free to go and that he expected her to go. But she lingered. "What's the matter, father?" she inquired. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing," he assured her. "The contrary. To-day Berkeley and I completed the sale of the works, and for the first time in my life I'm—free!" He laughed, straightening his shoulders as if he liked to remind himself that the harness was no longer binding them. "Free!"

"I'm so glad!" cried the girl. "Now you can enjoy life."

"So I can," said he with light irony. "I've been in here all afternoon, thinking about it." The abstracted look came into his eyes. "Thinking! I've done precious little of it during these years of work—precious little. I've really had no time until to-day. This afternoon I've been feeling as strange as a man who has been doing a long sentence in the 'pen' and is out in the free air again." He glanced at Norma's sympathetic, puzzled face. "I'm half inclined to go back to the 'pen' and ask them to lock me up again. There seems to be no place for me—in the life outside."

"I think I understand," said Norma reflectively.

"I hope you don't," replied he, with a queer laugh. "Now run along."

When she had kissed him and was gone, he lit a cigar and seated himself on the veranda and resumed

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his thinking—his survey of past, present, future. All those years he had been doing with all his might the task he had set for himself as soon as he discovered that to live, in any true sense of the word, one must be financially secure, independent. And now he had completed his task, had earned his independence, his freedom, had come out of the “pen.” And, lo! his children were grown—one of them about to marry—the other no longer at home, except for little stops between visits during the brief school vacation—and his wife— Well, she was a wife—and—what else was there? Either he must go back to the “pen” or make a wholly new life for himself. What kind of a new life? The only kind he had had a chance to learn about was that life of the “pen.” Was there no other? Was there in all the world nothing to satisfy the longings that were beginning to stir and to sprout within him? Must he go back to his dreary, sordid task, his dollar-chasing? “There *must* be something else—something worth while. What I need is a teacher, a helper.” . . . And he was all alone—except Sophy. He did not even think of her, so preposterous was the idea of appealing to her to aid him in such a matter as discovering how to use his powers to some purpose.

An hour—two hours—nearly three passed, he oblivious of his surroundings. He was startled by Sophy’s voice, peevishly plaintive now: “Charles, aren’t you *ever* coming to bed?”

He glanced up like a rudely awakened sleeper. His wife’s form seemed to fill the doorway, and the beams of the early setting moon upon her face revealed no trace of the romantic beauty that had been hers. She looked enormous in her loose white nightgown with a kimono flung askew over it—enormous and shapeless.

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"You'd better have been in bed than sleeping in your chair," she went on, frowning and fretful, and accusing him of her own pet weakness. Indulgence in it had just upset her temper and given her a slight headache and set the neuralgia faintly to threatening.

He looked away. "She has sacrificed herself to her children," he muttered in self-reproach at his thoughts during the past hour, at their savagely critical climax on sight of her. But the perverse voice within him retorted, "Not so! She has sacrificed her beauty and your love to her indolence." He knew that to blame a human being for not being different was much like blaming an apple tree for not being a rose bush; so, he retorted upon his insurgent self: "Still, she couldn't help it." Yet, by that same rule, how could he blame himself for not being able to accept her as she was, for not being, like her, "settled"?

"The trouble with me," he reflected, "is that I'm out of work. I *must* get in harness again. I must stop—thinking."

"Do come to bed!" railed Sophy, who had been regarding him sourly. "You know how the lights distress me."

"Beg your pardon," apologized he, with an eager and embroidered courtesy that disconcerted her.

He rose and followed her upstairs. Soon they were asleep side by side—as peaceful a picture of domestic unity as the moon saw in its tour of the round world.

II

"WHAT ELSE IS THERE?"

MURDOCK was off early next morning for New York to join Tom Berkeley and sign the final paper and receive the checks and securities. This business was a matter of a few hours. But, instead of going straightway home as he intended when he left, he lingered in New York.

"Why rush back?" said Tom. "You forget you're free now. There's nothing to go back to."

"That's a fact," agreed Murdock.

"Except, of course, the family."

"Of course," said Murdock, with unnecessary haste and emphasis.

"And I don't think," Tom went on, "that your family bothers you much more than mine does me. As my wife often says—she's *mighty* shrewd— As she often says, American men are a race of bachelors. It's amusing to hear foreigners and these scrubby half-males that do the scribbling talk about this country as the paradise of women, as the place where the women run everything. We do let the women run the children and the culture and the frivolous end of the game. But when it comes to things worth while, the women aren't in it. When I talk to my wife about business or politics, it's just as if I was alone and talking to myself to get a line on what I ought to do.

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She don't know the a b c's of practical affairs. That's as it should be."

Murdock made no comment. If he had spoken, it would have been simply to assent.

"The respectable women," proceeded Berkeley, like a man feeling his way with another, "are the steady round of the three plain square meals. The others are the occasional banquet with French cooking and several kinds of wine."

Murdock saw that Tom was breaking ground for an attempt to induce him to join in the extremely unconventional relaxations of which he had observed his elderly ex-partner was becoming increasingly fond, and in which he was indulging with rapidly accelerating boldness. As he had no intention, or inclination, to enter this new partnership, he cut Tom off with a curt, "Women don't interest me. I've forgotten how to play games, and I'm too old and too tired to relearn."

"Well," said Tom, by way of dismissing the subject for the time, "a man of leisure—a gentleman—has got to pass the days—and the evenings—somehow. Maybe, you'll find out that you aren't older than you look, and aren't tired at all."

Indeed, while he was uttering the words, Murdock was thinking how false they sounded. In that casual way in which he observed matters not directly connected with his career, he had seen that his wife was losing her youth; and he assumed that he himself was "getting on," also. And all this had seemed natural and proper because most of the people round about, following the traditional unenlightened, unthinking ways that lead to premature decrepitude, physical and mental. *were aging even more rapidly.* But what

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Charley and Norma said, coming just when he was in the frame of mind to hear and to note, seemed to have set him off in a new direction. He was watching uneasily, yet with growing fascination, the spring of youth, of interest in the pleasures of youth, bubbling up within him, now that the weight of business care had been removed from its source. He was making dutiful efforts to suppress it, like a monk who fights against being a man. But his efforts only seemed to demonstrate how futile his struggle was. On came the spring—sparkling—flooding—overflowing fields so long fallow that he had thought them desert.

Perhaps the first symptom—at any rate the first that definitely disquieted him—was finding his own eyes following Berkeley's wandering glances at the expensive looking women who are seen in New York ever more boldly and in ever-increasing numbers, in public places. When he was a boy that sort of women were a sorry lot of stealthy creatures, rarely seen in the streets, visited only in secrecy; they were ignorant, could appeal only to appetite in its coarsest, crudest form, seldom saw respectable men not under the influence of drink. Now——

"How clean and neat these women are," said Murdock to Tom, without suspecting his own deep hidden train of thought.

"Very different from the respectable domestic frumps, ain't they?" replied Tom, with no intent to stab; for he saw Sophy rarely and only when she was got up for company.

Murdock flushed, glanced quickly at Berkeley, was reassured.

These luxurious, elegant, expert women seemed to have command of all the arts that appeal to the light

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side of man's nature. They were like fine wines—could be taken in whatever quantity the whim of desire happened at the moment to demand—as a gentle, exhilarating stimulant, or as provokers and panders to the frenzy of the debauch. They looked as if with them the whole gamut of sensation could be run—from the most delicate subtle sensuousness refined as indulgence in a taste for flowers or art or poetry, down and down, and yet down. But his intelligence, aided by closer observation of them, as they disported themselves in his neighborhood, showed him that their range was limited, very limited, would satisfy only the moods of such coarse and indiscriminating tastes as those of his friend Berkeley. After the first glance, at the second glance, he penetrated their shallow shimmer, and they ceased more than casually to attract him. But they had by no means been uneffectual. They had moved him to wonder vaguely whether there might not be a woman who could tempt him—a woman who did contain the whole gamut, the appeal to every mood, a woman who was the sum of all the delights, the woman he had dreamed as a boy. And he admitted there might be such a one—but not among these.

He made another discovery that had immediate and obvious results.

The Puritan idea as to sobriety of dress soon lost its influence over woman. It interfered too seriously with her chief business, the winning of the male; it cut too savagely into profits and possibilities of profit in sundry and divers industries. But this idea has not yet lost its hold upon the other sex, has been vigorously assailed only within a very few years, at least in America. Murdock had always accepted and acted upon it, without giving the matter any thought

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whatever. He inherited from his mother an unpuritanic instinct for neatness and cleanness and against that profound slovenliness which is hid beneath a surface shine. He adopted the custom of bathing every day as soon as he heard of it, and he put bathroom into his house long before New York took up cleanliness as a fad. Also he gradually developed a sensitiveness about his linen and underclothing. But in outward dress he conformed to the custom established around him. Two years before, he took a valet, but only because he happened to observe how much time Berkeley's valet saved his master, and how much petty annoyance. He ignored his valet's hints as to the meagerness of his wardrobe; he assumed he had quite as many and as good clothes as a sober, hard-working, serious man of affairs could afford.

Now, however, he began to observe the rapid revolution in man's dress that came in America with the sudden development of wealth and leisure. He saw that all the Eastern men of his acquaintance, men as important in affairs as he, men of far greater importance, were most particular in dress—that they gave it more attention and spent more money on it than the average woman of the prosperous classes out West. He saw that not only was it not regarded as effeminate to be well dressed throughout, but also it was regarded as a mark of crudeness, of vulgarity even, to be badly or carelessly dressed. A few years before, there had not been in New York's fashionable district half a dozen shops for finery for men; now he saw almost as many shops offering men's luxuries as shops offering luxuries for women. And up rose within him the progressive man's desire to keep abreast of the times, to dress like the men of his time, not like those

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of the more provincial, more Puritanic era from which New York had shaken itself free. He began to shop—to investigate, to discover, to order. The farther he went, the more interested he became, and the more eager to surround himself with the attractive comforts of which he, through inattention and ignorance, had been depriving himself.

Education in these matters came as easily to Murdock as one recalls a disused language one has once known well. If he had thought about it and had been of those who love fanciful explanations for commonplace phenomena, he would have suspected himself of having had royal ancestors, or of being a reincarnation of some classic voluptuary. But he was, in fact, hardly conscious of what he was doing. It was his habit to decide a course of action almost by intuition, apparently, and to pursue it to its goal without argument or reflection—or deflection. He imagined he was simply making rather extensive purchases to supply too long neglected personal needs. In reality, he was definitely breaking with his whole past. For, of those external forces that combine to make us what we are, dress is one of the most potent. It determines the character of our associations, determines the influences that shall chiefly surround and press upon us. It is a covering for our ideas no less than for our bodies. True, in changing his appearance Charles Murdock was merely giving frank expression to his real personality, which had all those years been latent and unsuspected even by himself. But it is also true that if he had not thus given expression to it, given it a taste of freedom from its lifelong Puritanic restraints, he might easily have remained until the end what he had so long seemed to be, and had always honestly

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believed himself to be. Rarely, indeed, are our acts that seem crucial and decisive really of any great importance; and how often do the seeming trivialities work the profound changes. Causes, the real causes must be sought with the microscope, not with the telescope.

The morning of his last day in New York he hesitated before the glass when he finished shaving. Then, with color in his cheeks and embarrassed self-mockery in his eyes, he lathered the mustache he had worn for twenty years. A few strokes of the razor; the face before him transformed. He gazed long at it, not in vanity, though vanity would have been excusable, but with a mingling of wonder, pleasure—and dread. He went to the handsome new leather traveling box on the trunk rests at the foot of the bed. He lifted the cover and from a pocket in its lining took a folded photograph case—the pictures of his wife and their two children. He opened the case, stood it up on the dressing table before him, studied the face of his wife.

The photographs must have been taken full five years before, for the boy and the girl there were not in their teens. But as early as the birth of the first baby Sophy had discarded the enchantment that captured him. The vanity of clothes and jewels she retained, and, to the limit of her small knowledge and timid ideas of spending money, fostered. That cost her no effort; she had only to buy, the dealers even sparing her the exertion of choosing. But at the behest of indolence and self-indulgence she put out the eyes of her vanity of personal appearance. Why strive to keep contour and waist and youthful bust and hip measure, when those carnalities had served their whole purpose,

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men the only man she needed to please was solemnly edged to be permanently pleased under the seal of the marriage vows?

Guiltily Murdock folded the case and put it away. "I ought to be ashamed," he muttered.

And he was; but we cannot shame ourselves away from thought.

He dined in the men's café of the Waldorf that night. Not that he had definitely reasoned out his peril; simply an instinctive wariness of the impulses now astir at the very surface before a straight admiring glance into his rejuvenated face from any woman with beauty and slenderness and that alluring New York scrupulousness as to the smallest detail of person and dress. All those years he had been bent over his desk; now he had dropped it, was in the doorway of his bare, dismal workshop, was looking out over the world, beckoning him to the far-stretching sensuous gardens radiant in the sunshine. And the youth within him was saying: "You have slighted, suppressed me long enough. I demand my right to live, to enjoy. You cannot hold me in leash with this slender cord of duty and propriety. I shall compel you to live before you grow old and die."

Murdock was in his doorway, was pretending to himself that he had no intention of advancing. But his late partner made no such pretenses—indeed, never had. "It's amazing how many of the good-looking females are in this part of New York," said Tom, addressing no one in particular, as he and Murdock and their chief New York lawyer, Morris, sat at dinner in Belmont's palm garden. Tom's bold, greedy eyes were roaming restlessly. Whenever they found a woman to his taste, their expression was enough to

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give her the sense of actual handling by those thick white hairy fingers of the sensualist.

"They bear a casual glance fairly well," conceded Morris, with a sour thought for his own fashion-able "home." "They're always on the watchout for men with money. That's all the women care about nowadays—the money to keep 'em going."

Murdock could not have colored more uncomfortably had Morris been aiming directly at him. "Of course that's why," thought he. "They suspect me of having money."

But somehow the reflection did not make them less attractive. Their skins looked just as clear and cool and soft; their sensuously draped figures and the languorous shine of their eyes were just as alluring. "I seem bent on making a damn fool of myself," he jeered at himself angrily. "I must get back home."

And next morning he was off in his private car, Berkeley reluctantly consenting to go with him. The first few hours they talked business—the successful settlement, the enormous profit, the future investments. But neither was interested; each was secretly revolving the same idea. Berkeley brought it toward the surface by saying: "Well, Charles, and what are you going to do to pass the time? Our places on the board needn't give us much worry."

Murdock shrugged his shoulders.

"Rather extensive orders you left at that tailor's," teased Berkeley. "And why this sudden interest in ties and shirts and silk socks and fine underclothes—and pyjamas—with big monograms in colors. Suspicious—that, old man. Those monograms!"

Murdock's response was a slight indifferent laugh.

"Beginning to sit up and take notice, eh?" sug-

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gested Tom with a chuckle that got upon Murdock's nerves. "Next thing, you'll be looking for trouble."

"What are *your* plans?" inquired Murdock, apparently not the least interested in Tom's diagnosis.

"No more business for me, thank you," replied Berkeley, easily set off upon the subject that occupied him exclusively—himself. "I never did have any taste for it. I'm going to shoot and fish, race horses, travel a bit—perhaps, do a little collecting. One thing is certain. I'm going to live in little old New York. No more town or country for me. The finest views on earth are out over the roofs of houses—acres and acres of roofs. Then you feel that you've got human beings round you, that there's something doing."

He half closed his eyes, leaned back, blew a great cloud of smoke upward, and seemed to be enjoying with all his senses the visions in the cloud. "I always get rooms in New York high up, where I can look out over the city. Talk about the elixir of youth—it's the air of a big city! The people don't dodder and rot in a big city. They *live*! They've got something to live for. They keep their youth and their looks—and their minds. It takes a city, a smashing big city, to turn out the right sort of men and women, and good food and plenty of amusement. And everybody isn't prying into your affairs all the time."

Murdock glanced at Berkeley with good-humored irony. Berkeley's expression became somewhat sheepish. Said Murdock: "We know what it means, when a man or a woman complains of being spied on."

"It's all very well for you to feel that way, Charles," retorted Berkeley. "You're content at home."

"Rather!" exclaimed Murdock, precipitate and vigorous.

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get for like, and we haven't the annoyance of being liked—loved.”

Murdock gave a quick glance of dissent. Berkeley would not have understood, had he noted; his imagination had no wings. “A sensible man wants to love a woman,” he proceeded, “but he don't want love from her. Love means jealousy, hanging on when a man wants to go. It means scenes and tears and no end of sloppy gush.”

“That sounds like good business sense,” commented Murdock. He was not certain whether he was more repelled or more roused to envy by his friend and partner's views.

“I never could see why men don't apply common sense to their relations with women just as they do to business,” pursued Berkeley. “What the world needs is to be got on a sound business basis, and all this silly slush of sentiment done away with. I want friends who do something for me in exchange for what I do for them. Give and take—that's the right basis. I never yet saw a sentimental friendship or a love affair, where one party, and usually both, wasn't longing—yes, by gad, and scheming—to get something for nothing. But all this isn't an answer to my question. Don't be so damn secretive. You needn't be afraid you'll shock *me*. Tell me what you're going to do. . . . I've an idea you'll rush back to business. You don't care much for friends or for the ladies, God bless 'em—though those gorgeous monograms——”

“Business, I guess,” said Murdock. He looked somber, and his tone was somberer.

“That's where you get your happiness.”

“Occupation,” corrected Murdock brusquely. “I'm not looking for happiness. Happiness is like that love

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you rail against. It's hard to get, impossible to keep, hard to get over."

"That depends on what you mean by happiness. You don't include my kind. I intend to get and to keep myself in A-1 physical condition—lots of fresh air and exercise, little food, less drink, no excesses. I'll treat my five senses like so many valuable workmen that you can't replace—work 'em up to capacity, but see that they have plenty of rest and recuperation. I'll live thirty years yet—thirty good years, for I'm only fifty-five." The end of his long, strong nose twitched. "And I'll enjoy every minute of them. And I tell you, Murdock—" He gave his thick leg a thwack with his hairy, well-kept hand—"I'll be liked better and spread more sunshine in surrounding myself with cheerfulness than any of the high-plane people."

"Probably," said Murdock. With an expression far from flattering he studied the sybarite, now absorbed in the dreams he had conjured. Berkeley was one of those rich voluptuaries who note and keenly enjoy every item of the luxury and comfort and consideration their riches give them. As he smoked he looked with shining eyes at the costly cigar, enjoying its color, its fine unbroken ash; and each time he put it to his mouth he tasted it, rolling it over his thick moist lips. There is an animalism self-delighted and self-unconscious that has a certain fascination. Such was Berkeley's; and Murdock would no more have condemned him than he would have condemned a pig. But the Berkeley plan of life had small attraction for him. It was too infantile, too much like leading processions of children endlessly through candy shops. He envied Tom the ability to be a child, a mere animal; but

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he himself must adapt his own life to his own temperament. "Business, I guess," reflected he, "with possibly politics. What else is there?" He was intense, concentrated; he could not wander aimlessly even in garden of pleasure.

III

"A GOOD WOMAN, BUT—"

HE was descending at the side door from the auto that brought him from the station when his son, on the porch, cried out: "Why, father! Your mustache is off!"

"So it is," said Murdock, feeling his lip, as if just discovering his loss.

"Look at his lip, mother!" cried Charley, as Sophy appeared. There being "nobody" to see, she was in her normal state—the private condition of those who like to live one way in the parlor and another in the rest of the house. Her hair, carelessly done, showed it had not been washed recently. There was a highly unbecoming shine on her face. Her ill-fitting corset, her blouse so badly cut that it pulled across the bust, would have made her lack of symmetry grotesque to unaccustomed eyes. The only feature of her toilet not unattractive was her shoes. She was extremely proud of her feet, as indeed she had reason to be. And she always wore boots or shoes or slippers worthy of them. But usually, as now, her feet were hidden by the bottom of a dowdy skirt. She fixed a disapproving gaze upon her husband's shaven lip.

"What did you do that for?" she demanded, as he touched the cheek she offered for the perfunctory matrimonial salute. Her voice was sour, suspicious.

"I've often intended to shave it, as I never liked it,"

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said he. "But I've always been too busy—in too big a rush to get through and away."

"Now, you look younger than ever," cried Charley. "If I were mother, I'd keep an eye on you."

"Where did you learn to talk so low?" said his mother severely. "You never heard that kind at home."

"Mother—mother!" exclaimed her son, exasperated. "Haven't you got *any* sense of humor?"

But Sophy was moodily eying his father, who was giving orders to the chauffeur. The boy went into the house. "What were you doing in New York so long?" she demanded, when the auto was gone and her husband returned to her.

"I've been gone only about a month," was his reply in a mollifying tone, though it irritated him to be thus cross-examined. Never before had he had the experience.

"I wanted to go," she went on. "But you said it'd simply be a case of there and back."

"You told me nothing about wanting to go. If you wish to go to New York, why don't you? What's to prevent?"

"You know I couldn't, without you. I wouldn't give people cause to talk."

"I think your reputation would weather it," said he, with intent of pleasantry.

Her eyes snapped. "That's right—insult me! Taunt me because I've sacrificed myself to you and the children."

"Sophy!" he exclaimed in astonishment. He had no suspicion that during the month she, too, had been revolving thoughts suggested by their children's careless talk. Even where women, or men, are forced by flaunted signs to admit they are "not what I once was."

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a very little flattery, however faintly insinuated, will cause vanity to perk up and to become fantastically optimistic. Sophy Murdock, studying her reflection in the mirror with the infatuate eyes we turn upon ourselves, discovered that her change was hardly more than in style of beauty, that she had merely bloomed from the girlish into the womanly. If she had believed her own oft-repeated phrases of self-depreciation, she would never have uttered them.

She was waiting now for him to smooth her ruffled vanity. But the unconscious Murdock busied himself unbuttoning the dust coat he had worn in the auto. As he took it off, he revealed a new suit of traveling tweeds of far more youthful cut and style than he had ever worn before; and, instead of the familiar four-in-hand tie of some unobtrusive pattern, there fluttered before his wife's wide, wrathful eyes a bright butterfly of summer silk. At the effect of his new finery upon her he flushed; the flush spread as he grew angry at himself for showing embarrassment, angry at her for having the unexpected shrewdness to penetrate the reasons for this blossoming out—reasons he was not admitting to himself.

"I *knew* it!" she exclaimed. "I've had a presentiment all the time you've been away. You ought to be *ashamed* of yourself, Charles Murdock—for the children's sake even if you haven't any regard for *my* feelings."

"What now?" cried he.

"To come back home, dressed like a boy that's running round with the girls. You, a settled married man, with *grown* children."

"Sophy, what *is* the matter?" he demanded; for he now realized that she was stirred to the depths.

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"It's for *me* to ask what's come over *you*," retorted she. No longer could she deny to herself that anybody would say this husband of hers looked younger than she, might put it that he "looks almost young enough to be her son." And he, deliberately dressing himself to encourage malignance—it was intolerable! "I thought," she sneered, "you had sense enough to be sober and dignified, as you should be at your time of life."

He felt apologetic before her fury, felt he must try to calm her. Also, there would presently be disclosed that entire new wardrobe, extensive, luxurious, gay beyond any apparel he had ever possessed. "Sophy, don't you think we'd be making a mistake to let ourselves grow old before there's any necessity for it? The world has changed. When we were children, people looked on themselves as 'out of it' and on the way to old age long before they were forty. That isn't the way nowadays——"

"I've got no liking for foolishness," she cut in. "We're grown-up people. I, for one, don't propose to make a fool of myself by trying to act otherwise. When I was a child, as the apostle says, I acted like a child. But now that I'm grown, I've put away childish things."

"That's all very well," replied he persuasively. "But it's not what I'm talking about. I'm simply saying, it's not dignity but a very unwise kind of laziness to give up physically. It reacts and makes one sodden and stupid——"

"So! You think your wife sodden and stupid, do you?" Her heavy face was red with rage; her eyes blazed at him a fury that was very like hatred. "Sodden and stupid!"

He made an impatient gesture, gave her a look that

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owed her into silence; for she did not understand him, and we are all in awe of what we do not understand, and can be frightened by its unfathomed possibilities. He went into the house, shut himself up in the library, at dinner he spoke only when Charley or Norma addressed him directly; his wife did not venture even to glance at him. After dinner he retired to the library again, not to reappear until eleven o'clock. She was still in the sitting room, though it was an hour past her bedtime. He had been looking at her several minutes, as she sat humped up and reading a novel, before she realized that he was in the room.

"Are you ready to go to bed?" said she, laying aside the novel and rising.

"Yes," he replied, and opened the door for her to pass out.

When they were in the dressing room they used in common, she by way of overture toward resuming their ordinary relations began crossly, "I had to wait for you. It disturbs me when you come to bed after I do."

"You spoke of this the other day," said he. A long pause, then he added: "You know, I once suggested we'd be more comfortable with separate dressing and sleeping rooms."

"I know you did," snapped she, and anger made her fingers so clumsy that she tore out a buttonhole in her blouse. "And I told you what I thought of it. I wasn't brought up with such immoral ideas. Husband and wife are one flesh. They belong together."

"As you please."

When she was in bed, and he about ready to join her, he went toward the windows. "Don't touch those windows," cried she. "Leave them shut."

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"The room's so close, I can hardly stand it now," he began.

"Not a thought for me!" railed she. "Never a thought for me. It's the open windows that have been giving me the neuralgia. Katy warned me, but I didn't pay attention. I was brought up to be careful and keep out the poisonous night air, but you would have everything open, and I never insist on myself. I got rid of the neuralgia while you were away, and I won't go back to it."

"But the night's very warm—hot."

"How can you be so brutal! But, then, what'd you care, if I was tortured with pain?"

"Very well—very well," interrupted he. "The windows stay shut."

When the lights were out, she tossed and turned irritably, more wide awake than when she was up and dressed. Dr. Schulze had once told her that in her case, as with almost all the pathetic victims of mental anguish, there was a purely physical reason for insomnia, quite sufficient to account for it—and for her headaches, neuralgia, sciatica, and all her woes, mental and physical. He had said she had that painless kind of indigestion which gives no physical warning but causes ferocious attacks of "the blues" by day, and drives sleep from the eyes at night and keeps the mind tossing in a foaming flood of melancholy fancies. But she disdained this unspiritual explanation. And now it was her husband only, the anxieties he was causing her, that made her thus miserably wakeful. She told herself that while he was away in New York somebody—"probably that low Tom Berkeley, perhaps some woman"—had filled him with silliness and wickedness. "I couldn't go with him. I've got the house and the

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children to look after—and my health poor from all my toiling and slaving." In fact, she had had servants to wait upon her all her married life, had done no toiling, much less slaving. But "toiling and slaving" was one of her pet phrases, got from her mother, who had excuse, perhaps right, to use it. By reiteration any idea, however palpably absurd, gradually wins acceptance, if nobody has any especial reason of interest to combat it. Sophy had made not only herself but also her family, and the people of Saint X generally, believe that she had "toiled and slaved" by saying it frequently and with plaintive meekness. "Husbands," ran on the gloomy current of her wakeful night thoughts, "ought never to be allowed to go away without their wives. Men are so weak and coarse. Now, here he's come home, a moral wreck."

How reclaim him? Not how make him again the lover. No, not the lover again; there was a time for the "foolishness" of passion, and a time for putting "foolishness" forever aside. No, not the lover again. How make him a model husband, even as she was a model wife—a sober, sensible, "settled" person?

While she tossed and fretted and raged he lay beside her motionless, but as far from sleep as she. He had trained himself to dismiss at will any disagreeable subject when revolving it would avail nothing. But that night he could not dismiss the odor from her hair. She never washed it while one of her spells was on, and she would not resume the not very frequent washings until absolutely sure she was entirely well. He lay as near his edge of the bed as he could; he tried to convince himself that he was yielding to perverse and most unkind imagination. In vain. With the windows tight closed the air was so close that in ordinary cir-

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cumstances he would soon have been stupefied into a semblance of slumber. But every time she twisted or turned there arose from her mop of hair that strong, sour, sickening odor to rouse his nerves from on-creeping stupor, to sting them till they quivered.

"Good God!" he muttered, "surely a little soap and water wouldn't kill her!"

He reminded himself, by way of self-reproach, that he had often before noticed this odor, and others even more trying, yet had not been thus insurgent. "It's the closed windows," thought he. "If they were open, even an inch or so——"

But the shut windows did not wholly account for the change in him, though he fancied they did. Therefore he had accepted her slovenliness, personal and in the household, as necessary incidents to married life, as in a way the conventional signs of the domestic woman—of the virtuous "homebody," free from "foolishness." Now, with the new ideas that had come as soon as he had begun to put his mind to other than merely commercial uses—or, rather, the newly awakened part of his nature—he was beginning to question, to dispute, to deny—to flout his long dominant other self of the old-fashioned ideas and of the old-fashioned unquestioning reverence for custom and tradition.

"No wonder men fly from home to those other women," he muttered, with somewhat the blasphemer's combination of fear and recklessness. "Why, if *they* acted like this they wouldn't make their salt."

If he had not quarreled with her that afternoon he would have risen up and passed the night on the sofa down in his library. As it was, he stiffened his nerves and lay quiet. "She's far too good for me, anyway," said he to himself. "I'm getting to be a kicker and a

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crank like all idlers. I must go to work again or I don't know where I'll land."

But these reflections seemed to have no calming effect upon the odor. "Yes," thought he, "she's a good woman, but it does seem to me I'd wash at least my hair now and then, and risk neuralgia. It can't be much worse than this."

IV

"MY LIFE'S OVER"

HE waited until her breathing assured him he was free; then he stealthily rose and went into the dressing room, softly closing the door between. Wrapped in a bath robe, and covered with an afghan, he got a few hours' sleep on the little lounge there near an open window. When she awoke it was nearly nine o'clock; as he was very regular she knew he had been gone since half past seven. We are all surprised to find our troubles with us after a sleep; Sophy was not an exception. In addition to her mental or moral woes there was now a fierce headache. Also, a sciatic pain was stabbing at her left side. "He'll be the death of me," she moaned. "After the life I've led I've not got much endurance left." She rang for Katy, and said to her: "I don't want any breakfast. I couldn't swallow a mouthful."

Katy was prepared for this, and had her habitual answer ready. "Oh, but you *must* eat *something*, Mrs. Murdock," urged she. "You know it's mighty bad to begin the day on an empty stomach. I'll just go down and have the cook fix you up something tempting and tasty."

"Well, I'll do my best," conceded Sophy, speaking, *and feeling*, as if she were doing Katy a favor. "I do

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believe coffee is bad for me. You might bring me chocolate—with a little whipped cream."

"Cream's very nourishing. They've got some nice sausages—very light and small."

"Just one, Katy. And maybe I could eat a few corn cakes if they're crisp and thin."

While Katy was gone Mrs. Murdock lay motionless, hoping to allay the throbbing in her head. "Thank God," said she, "I've got a good digestion. I don't know what'd become of me if I couldn't eat enough to keep up my strength."

In her healthy, vigorous girlhood every pleasure of the senses attracted her. But eating being the only pleasure that calls for no effort whatever she had now narrowed down to it, and was in the way to become a glutton. When Katy appeared with the breakfast tray she at once felt a little better. The odor from it—from the sausage, the well-browned hot cakes, the chocolate—was most stimulating. She sat up in bed, put both the pillows behind her. The big oily coil into which her hair had been done for the night was loose and hung over one ear, threatening to fall. She took it down and rerolled it. "I think we'll have to wash my hair soon, Katy," said she. "It's getting so it'll hardly stay up. What a trouble long hair is! Now—put the tray on my lap. Why, you've brought *three* sausages."

"There's really nothing to 'em, Mrs. Murdock. They just melt away. And you mustn't starve yourself, you know."

Sophy fell to, ate all the sausages, all the cakes, drank two cups of the chocolate with whipped cream. Katy begged to be allowed to bring more. But Sophy resisted. "No, I guess I'd better not. It's only three

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hours till lunch, and I think I've taken enough to stay me."

"And you do feel better, don't you, ma'am?"

"Very much," replied Sophy. "I'll just lie here a few moments, and then I think I'll be strong enough to get up and dress."

Katy took away the tray. When she returned Sophy was groaning. "It's come back!" she cried. "My head feels as if it'd burst, and the pain in my heart is frightful. I'm afraid I oughtn't to have eaten."

"Oh, you'd have been much worse if you hadn't, ma'am. Taking a little nourishing food could never do a body any harm."

"Dr. Schulze says food's poison when the system isn't in condition to receive it."

"I'm surprised at your paying attention to that crank," said Katy. "And he's an atheist, too."

"I feel—dreadful!" moaned Sophy. "But it can't be the breakfast, for my digestion is all right. No, it's all my—my worries. Let me have the hand glass."

"I'll pull down the shades and put hot water on your head," pleaded the maid.

"The glass first," insisted Sophy.

Katy went into the dressing room for it—most reluctantly, as her mistress was looking her worst. But Katy was reckoning without the partiality of the human glance when it is bent upon the features that are the dearest and most attractive in all the world. Instead of dropping the glass in horror Sophy gazed long and earnestly. "I do look bad, don't I?" said she, in the tone that invites contradiction. But Katy was silent. "Still, I'm showing that I'm not well," continued Sophy. "And what wonder that I am't."

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"Yes, indeed—with all the work and worry you have, ma'am."

Sophy sighed. "You don't know half—not half," she said with gloomy mystery. "I'm afraid I'll have to go to old Schulze. I'm a little yellow, and a little bit flabby." Not very flabby; she could find nothing to criticise in the broad expanse of her neck. "And my skin," thought she, "is as smooth as it always was. Nobody ever did have such a skin." Still, a tonic would do her good; then, she'd not take such an absurdly gloomy view of Charles's silly attempt to defy nature and conventionality by trying to go back to youth. "Yes, I must see Dr. Schulze if I don't feel better in a day or two."

To Katy she said, "Take the glass away and bring the hot water. I'll not get up till I feel better. I think I'm having a chill—and my head—" She sank back with a groan— "Oh, Katy, how I am suffering! I'm sure I oughtn't to have eaten those sausages. Why did you bring *three*? I told you not to. Not a word! You know you've done wrong. Get the hot water—and I'll take one of those headache powders. Is there a capsicum plaster in the house? If not, send somebody for one. No, get two. They come two for a quarter. No matter how sick I am I never neglect things."

She felt—when the headache was quieted somewhat by the powder—she felt that, in a way, this illness was not inopportune. She could put it to use in bringing round her wayward husband. With Charley, and Blagden, his former chief secretary, whom he had retained as private secretary, he was about to go away on a shooting trip; her time was short. Tears he could withstand, as she had learned early in their married life. Reproaches and entreaties had no effect, so far as she had

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ever been able to discover. But before illness he was always soft. She waited in confidence, not leaving her bedroom, scarcely leaving the bed, neglecting her toilet even more than usual—and her habits were those of the period preceding the gospel of the daily bath, the time when people regarded much attention to the intimate toilet as certainly unnecessary, probably sinful, and were disposed to interpret personal cleanness as a clean face and hands and regularity at church, and good housekeeping as a clean parlor and front stoop and everybody at family prayers before breakfast.

He suspected fraud in this illness; besides, he felt he had no responsibility in it. Still, he was gradually wrought upon by her abject appearance, the softening process being greatly aided by certain deep-down qualms of self-reproach for errant thoughts, for private criticisms of her appearance and mentality and inertia, criticisms the more unkind because true. Also, as she had been insisting on his occupying the same bed and sleeping, if it could be called sleeping, with the bedroom windows down, he was feeling none too well himself. When she began to take on that mortal look which makes so ghastly the faces of the fat though they be but indisposed and for only a few days, he felt guilty, remorseful.

On the sixth morning, soon after she had had Katy prop her up and bring breakfast, he braved again the close air, the stale, nauseating odors of their bedroom from which he had hastened at daybreak. "Have you had the doctor?" he asked abruptly, his tone a shallow pretense of gruffness, his eyes full of pity and pain.

She turned her face away to conceal her satisfaction. She shook her head and sighed.

"You *must* see Schulze."

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"What does it matter?" she muttered. "Nobody cares whether I live or die. My life's over."

"Nonsense," said he, seating himself on the bed and laying his hand upon hers, the more tenderly because touching her thus brought to him vividly the contrasting memory of a time when the sense of her would have made the blood leap in his veins. "Nonsense—Sophy!" He happened to glance down at her hand—a naturally beautiful hand it was—soft yet firm, slender, delicately shaped in palm and in fingers. And the nails were thin and pink and convex. But she had let the dead flesh grow raggedly up round the base of the nails, and under the rims they were far, far from clean. He did not drop her hand immediately; but he did immediately look away.

"A woman had better die when the bloom of her youth is gone," she continued mournfully. She glanced at him; so low in mind was she that for once his look of vigorous young manhood, his cleanness and freshness, the attractive way he was dressed, did not rouse her anger and hatred, but a dreary, resigned hopelessness. "Men care only for freshness," moaned she. "Gratitude and duty and respect are only words to them."

Bloom of youth! His eyes shifted from her disheveled, repellant homeliness. As he had imagination, his heart ached with pity. "Sophy," he said earnestly, "it's your illness that makes you think these things. Get well, and you'll be all right again. I'll call Schulze on the 'phone."

Her silence was assent; she herself was a little alarmed about her condition, was fearing she had gone too far in desperate measures to restore him to sense of her due. *He went to the telephone in the dressing room,*

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presently to return with: "Schulze wants to know whether you've had any breakfast."

"No," replied she, adding reproachfully, "how could I, sick as I am? I just forced down some oatmeal and cream and a cup of coffee."

Murdock was gone longer. When he reappeared, he said indignantly: "He won't come. He says you must come to him."

Her eyes flashed and she sat up in bed energetically. "Why didn't you tell him how ill I was?"

"I told him you couldn't raise your head off the pillow." Sophy hastily sank back. "Then," continued Murdock, in spite of himself less indignantly, "when I told him what you said about breakfast, he said: 'If that didn't kill her, it won't hurt her to come to me,' and he rang off. And when I got his office again his daughter said he was too busy to come to the 'phone."

Mrs. Murdock's eyes were sparkling. The appalling yellowish pallor of her skin was overlaid with the red of anger. "And the worst of it is, we're at the mercy of that brute!" she cried. "If he wasn't such a wonderful doctor he'd have been white-capped long ago—tarred and feathered and railed out of town. Here, I may be dying for all he knows, and he refuses to come!"

"It's useless to offer him an extra fee."

"Worse than useless," retorted she. "He'd probably refuse to treat me at all."

"We can get another doctor. There's his daughter, young Mrs. Ranger."

Sophy did not let slip the opportunity to discharge her anger upon some one less distant and less secure than Schulze. "What do you take me for? Do you think I'd let a *woman* touch me? The women, the good-looking ones, can fool you men. But I know women. They

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can't learn anything." She collapsed into sullen tears. "No, I'll risk my life and dress and go to him. The brute!"

By this time Murdock was seeing that her illness could not be so serious as he had imagined. "I guess there's nothing else to be done," said he, concealing his suspicion under a discreet appearance of deep sympathy. He noted the overpowering air of the room. "It'll certainly do her good to get any sort of a change from this air," he reflected. And he left her, to go to his affairs downtown, in a chastened but no longer humble mood; indeed, he felt somewhat foolish about the exaggeration of remorse that had dominated him a few moments before. "If she'd only eat less and stir about a little," he said to himself. "First thing she knows she'll be really sick. Her timidity about fresh water and fresh air is beginning to get on my nerves." But there he halted his dangerously frank thoughts; instinct warned him that in that direction lay truths he must not face.

V

SOPHY SEEKS A CONFESSOR

IN the course of an hour Sophy, groaning at every step but carefully dressed even to the cruelly tight stays wherewith she deemed it expedient in public to restrain her amplitude, descended to her victoria, to be driven to Dr. Schulze's trim little house with its gay German garden in front and at the side.

She made an astonishingly good appearance as she sat in her carriage in state, and as she swept into the sanitarily bare offices. But Sophy was always careful of appearances. None but her own family, the servants and, occasionally by accident one of the tradespeople, ever saw her as she was. She took the only vacant chair in the long line ranged against the wall of the waiting room; she noted that, save herself, the most important person in that motley assembly was a small grocer. "If I hadn't given him a piece of my mind and ordered him off the place," she thought, eying him severely, "he'd offer me his turn. As it is, I've got to wait. What an outrage!" But she knew she could only let her fury consume itself and vanish in its own steam; one of Schulze's many coarse notions was that disease and pain were no more severe and no more important in one kind of human being than in another. Indeed he would admit only two human estates—"sick-

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ness and health. The rest is either poppycock or tommyrot or both."

Like every man of will and intellect who does not have to conciliate his fellow-citizens in order to make a living, he was positive in speech and in action, was simple and direct. He traced all human ills, mental, physical, moral, economic, political, to the poor health of the overwhelming mass of the human race; he therefore revered his profession as above all the others. But, for that profession as usually practiced and for most of its practitioners, he had profound contempt.

"A tough race! A tough race!" he used to say. "It has been preyed upon by the priests and the doctors from the beginning—mind and body. Yet it survives and has even here and there made some slight progress." And again: "Medicine is like all the other professions. It advances only by compulsion from without. The average doctor resists a new truth about health and disease, partly because it is an insult to his pretense of already knowing all, but chiefly because it forces him to do some thinking." To Schulze the usual doctor seemed the exact synonym for pretentious ignorance. "Nothing is simpler than the science of health," he would say. "It consists in regularity, fresh air, simple food in small quantities, plenty of exercise. Dosing is simply an attempt to cure one disease by setting up another that may be slower, but is usually none the less deadly." And again: "Nothing better illustrates the ignorance and the depravity of the medical profession than the fact that, although *all* disease originates in disorder in the digestive apparatus, a doctor's first move is to make his wretched victim swallow a drug that will upset the stomach." And again: "The human body isn't a mystery; it's a machine. The mystery

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is how it withstands the abuse of its owner and his doctor."

The first twenty years of his career had been years of humiliation and poverty because he scorned to practice his profession as the "black art." The doctor who mystifies with hocus-pocus and "cures" with something to take two or three times a day in a spoon, or as a pill appeals at once to the credulity and to the laziness of his patient, like the priest who sells indulgences. But the doctor who shows his patient that disease isn't a visitation of Providence or bad luck, but is the patient's own mortal assaults upon his own health through eating, drinking and irregularity, and who orders as medicine a sane and temperate mode of life, with all the "good things" cut off—such a doctor seems a poor creature, a crank, to the average laymen, and to the average "learned practitioner." However, Schulze began by getting as patients those who "could not afford a better doctor," performed miracles of cure, gradually made his way against Saint X's passion for pretense and preference for the darkness of hocus-pocus rather than the light of unpretending common sense. The theory in Saint X was that his years of fierce struggle had embittered him; in fact, he was not bitter at all, simply uncompromising and using a gruff manner to protect his temper and his time against his patients. The attitude of most laymen toward the physician is precisely that of the people of the Middle Ages toward their priest—a notion that if they can wheedle him into giving them easy penance they will be saved just as securely as if they repented and reformed. Schulze would have none of this.

Mrs. Murdock had to wait full three quarters of an hour before her turn came. Instead of a servant to intro-

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duce his patients, Schulze had upon the door between office and waiting room a card which read, "When the lock clicks, the next in line will please enter." The spring attachment on the lock was worked from his desk. At the click Mrs. Murdock, the last in the waiting room, rustled and groaned into the presence of the ugly little man with the scarlet button of a nose and the eyes that were wondrous keen and kind. He was at his desk facing the door; a huge Oriental image, its face a ludicrous yet somehow awe-inspiring caricature of his own, squatted on a pedestal behind him. The light from the windows fell full upon the chair opposite him, which was obviously for the patient.

"So you managed to get here alive," he began, his tone and manner so sarcastic and so formidable that Sophy's great desire to rage at him vanished in a greater desire to conciliate him. Schulze applied to human nature the principle of physics that the way to overcome a force is to meet it with a stronger force from the opposite direction.

"And that's about all," replied she piteously. "I've been ill for the past six weeks. There's a pain in my——"

"Put out your tongue," he interrupted.

She put it out. Having thus at a stroke reduced her to compulsory and undignified silence, he with deliberation set his glasses on the tip of his buttonlike nose, threw his head back and, without moving nearer her, inspected the tongue. "Frightful," he said. "Frightful. Hide it!"

She drew her tongue in. "I don't wonder," she began again, "when I think of the pain——"

"Stop!" commanded the old man sharply. "The last time you were here, *what did I prescribe?*"

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Sophy looked miserable. "Two meals a day," she replied feebly.

"What kind of meals?"

"You said simple meals."

"I did. And what else?"

"I believe you recommended a walk."

"I *prescribed* a walk—a five-mile walk daily, rain snow, or shine."

"Yes—that was it, doctor," said Sophy humbly.

"Well?"

"I—I—did it."

"Until you felt all right again."

"My appetite came back."

"Um—um," he exclaimed contemptuously. "And the walk?"

"I take a drive almost every day."

"Didn't I tell you that while we're all moving toward death, those who walked there arrived long after those who drove?"

"You told me not to drive, if I could help it. But—doctor, it's impossible for a woman of my physique——"

"And what are you doing with such a physique?" demanded he. "In Strasburg where I was born the people live by nailing the feet of geese to the floor and stuffing them till their livers get fat. You treat yourself as those Strasburgers treat their geese. Didn't I tell you that fat was a disease? Didn't I warn you that if you let that disease run a few years longer, you'd be a shapeless mass before you were forty?"

"I wanted to see you about that, too," she said hastily. She colored. "I suppose you think I'm vain and set on foolishness that doesn't belong to my time of life——"

"Nonsense!" he interjected. "You're a young

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woman. You've been letting yourself go to rack and ruin. That's the way with human beings. Give them a chance at luxury, and they act like a cow in a corn patch. There's no excuse for you. If you hadn't a magnificent constitution, you'd be dead. You—most of the women of your class—are a disgrace. Never exercising, always ailing—tossed up in bed much of the time—taking on fat."

"Now, doctor!" she pleaded. "You're unjust. It runs in our family to lose our looks and get fat young."

"Then it runs in your family to lazy about and eat enough at each meal to choke them up for a week. It runs in families to be ignorant, madam, unless they go to school. It runs in families to be dishonest, unless they learn to make a living by honest work. It runs in families to——"

"Well, anyhow," she interrupted sullenly, "I want to get thin—or, at least, thinner."

"*One* sensible meal a day, and a ten-mile walk—*regularly*."

"But I want to get thinner right away. I must—must!" she exclaimed.

"It can't be done."

"I know there's some medicine I could take——"

"I'm a healer, not a murderer. Any medicine you took to make you thin would shorten your life."

Sophy began to sob. "I don't care if it does," she cried hysterically. "I can't live on, this way—I—I I'm losing my husband. He's trying to pretend he's a young man and is looking about. He don't admire stout women—I always knew it, but I couldn't help being stout. Besides, it's his duty to love me, his wedded wife, *the mother of his children*."

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"One meal a day; ten miles *regularly*."

"Yes—yes—I'll even do that," cried she. "Oh, my God, doctor! You don't know how I'm suffering. Not the physical pain—that's nothing. But can't you appreciate the misery, the heartache? What fiends men are! He took the best of my life, my beauty and my youth. And now he wants to cast me off. Yes, I know he does. Haven't I seen how the good women are treated by their husbands. How coarse and low married life is! A girl thinks it's romance. She thinks love means something above mere physical passion. Yet it's nothing but that—at least, the love of man is nothing but that. He never cared anything for me except for my looks——"

Schulze held up his stubby finger. "Listen to me, madam," he said. "Suppose you wanted a loaf of bread. Suppose you saw a lot of loaves in a bakeshop window. You'd take the one that looked best, wouldn't you?"

She made no reply.

"Are you listening?" he demanded severely.

"Yes," she said, gathering herself together.

"Wouldn't you?"

"Yes," she muttered.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "A man wants a wife. He takes the girl that looks the best to him. Why not? That's not coarse and low; it's sensible. It's the wisdom of instinct. The girl with the clear eyes and skin, the girl with the form that comes nearest the ideal of health and strength and a capacity for maternity. Sound hearts and sound minds live in sound bodies. Well! Now, suppose when he gets his loaf home he finds it's not good bread, finds that the *brown, crisp surface* was merely a trick, a snare——"

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"But I've been a good wife to him. I've made him a home——"

"You've made yourself a home," said Schulze impatiently. "Don't cant, madam—at least not to me. You've come to me to get well, not to pose. You yourself had to live somehow and somewhere, didn't you? You might as well put in a claim for his gratitude because you keep alive and don't starve yourself to death. The point is, what have you done for *him*?"

"I was a wife to him"—her eyes dropped—"as long as—as he seemed to wish me to be."

"But when your looks began to go—what appealed to him in your looks—then— Yes, I understand. You were a wife to him for a while, and you deserve no credit. He was, no doubt, an equally good husband. And then you got lazy and indolent— I needn't go into that. What next?"

"The children—" she ventured hesitatingly.

"Oh—yes—the children! You didn't want them, I suppose?"

She was silent.

"He didn't insist on it?"

Silence.

"No claim on him there, then."

"But I've been a good mother——"

"You mean you've superintended the mothers you hired for them. No cant, please. Let's get to the bottom of this. Have you been a companion to him in any way?"

"It isn't my fault that I'm not clever," she urged. "He didn't marry me for brains, anyhow. A man never does."

"Of course not. But there's something between a blue stocking and a blockhead isn't there? And if

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you're stupid, whose fault is it but yours? Lazy, madam, lazy! You took him for granted. It's lucky for you that, when it came to paying the bills, he didn't take it for granted they'd be paid somehow."

"But I've toiled and slaved——"

Schulze halted her with that irritating finger. "You've always had servants. Your physical condition shows you've done nothing—practically nothing. When your husband had all the real work and worry, how comes it that he's still young, and you're—" He waved his hand toward her as if she were an exhibit.

"You don't understand," she cried angrily. She would have stormed out of the office, but she felt she must discuss her affairs with some one—and who else was there—who else that would not betray her, gossip about her? "You put everything on a low plane," she went on. "You don't make any allowances for the sacred relationship of husband and wife, of——"

"Perhaps if you'd made less allowances for the sacred side of life and devoted more attention to the practical side you'd not be consulting me. Now, tell me, what have you really done for him?"

"But what has *he* done for me?"

"That's not the question. Let him take care of his own virtues and sins. What we want is to find out how *you* are to get well. And the first thing is to find the disease—*your* disease, not his." He rapped the fingers of his right hand irritatingly upon the knuckles of his left hand. "Do you love him?" he asked abruptly.

Her eyes dropped. "Of course," she said.

"You mean you don't."

"I—I never did understand him very well," she confessed.

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"You probably never thought much about him. He didn't run after other women, and he brought the money home regularly. So you just forgot about him, treated him as a person to get things from, not to give thought to?"

"He didn't need waiting on. We've always had servants."

"So he didn't even get that!"

"I did—did—love him at first," said she. "But after a while— Well, we didn't seem to have much to talk about, except just the things round the house. And he was busy, and I didn't know about his business."

"If you don't love him, what's your objection to losing him?"

She gazed at him in amazement. "Why, he's my husband!" she exclaimed.

Schulze lay back in his chair to laugh. "And what the devil does *that* mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, I know you have no respect for religion—or anything sacred," retorted she.

"Sacred be—damned. Let's talk sense. Is it money or just dog-in-the-manger vanity?"

"What do you mean?" she asked indignantly.

Sophy Murdock had had a moment of restlessness or resentment now and then, as Dr. Schulze's questions or comments cut sudden and deep into some particularly sensitive part of her vanity. But she had been under the hypnotic spell which the strong and steady intelligence can always throw over the weaker and vacillating. This spell was the more potent because Schulze was a doctor. Sophy had the usual feminine reverence for medical learning, and the feminine love of the confessor, to boot. With non-Catholic women

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the doctor, as a rule, supplies the universal longing for a secure confidant. But her vanity, sore through and through, began now fiercely to resent this "insulting and heartless" attitude toward her woes, physical and mental.

"You are no gentleman," she said haughtily, rising to go.

"I hope not," replied Schulze. "Good morning, madam." And click went the spring lock of the door into the hall.

Sophy lingered—that sharp click of dismissal struck terror to her heart. "I am a sick, a *very* sick woman," she wailed. "You have taken advantage of my illness to insult me."

Schulze, reading her like an open book, saw that his medicine was taking effect. He gave her the final dose: "I don't minister to sick vanities, madam, but to sick bodies. I know nothing about sensitive souls, but a great deal about sensitive stomachs. Your trouble is not in your soul but in your stomach—not in your heart, I may add, but in your vanity. Any of my colleagues will serve you far better than I could. You wish to be coddled, not cured."

Sophy flung pride and pretense to the winds. She sank upon a chair, clasped her hands, and with streaming eyes cried: "For God's sake, doctor, have mercy on me! I don't trust any of 'em but you. Say what you please. Only tell me how I can make myself attractive to my husband."

Her voice, naturally sweet and deliciously clear, could be very moving. It was moving now—and her soft, azure eyes, too. Schulze's tender heart responded to her sincerity. But he knew it would be fatal to let her see how she had touched him. With face very rosy

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ing and eyes blinking, he gained time by rising to close
198 the door of exit.

199 "I know I don't love my husband," she sobbed.
200 "How can you love anybody you don't understand and
201 feel at home with? I'm not interested in what he talks
202 about, and he don't listen when I talk. I don't even
203 love my children as I used to, since they've grown up
204 and got so much smarter than me. But I'm proud
205 of him, and it'd kill me to lose him to some other
206 woman. . . . Don't you think I've got any rights over
207 him at all?"

208 "It's hardly a question of your rights," replied
209 Schulze, his voice hoarse and uncertain. "That's
210 something for the courts. It's a question of what you
211 can make him glad and eager to give you."

212 "That's it, *that's* it!" she assented. "I'll do any-
213 thing you say."

He looked at her pityingly, dubiously. "You'll
have to change your whole course of life. You and
your husband have reached the perilous period of mar-
ried life among the well-to-do. Things aren't as they
used to be—the husband and wife working together,
growing old together, sinking together into the stu-
por of old age when they ought still to be young.
Now, one or the other is sure to keep alive, and the
one that dies must inevitably be sloughed off." He
was soliloquizing, unmindful of her presence. "When
it is the woman that stays alive, the tragedy usually
ends—or takes on another, a more acute phase—in the
divorce court. When it's the man, we don't know
about the tragedy so often—men are more merciful
to women than women to men. In fact, mercy isn't a
feminine quality. Nature made their nerves less sen-
sitive than men's, because they are the childbearers; so,

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they are naturally less sensitive about giving pain." He noted Sophy again. "But— In your case—" He paused, reflecting.

"I'll do anything you say—*anything*!" she repeated.

"I doubt it—frankly," said he. "But I'll tell you what to do. Rouse yourself. Take an interest in things—in helping those about you. Make your house your own, instead of a mere hotel with your housekeeper as manager. See that your husband is fed and clothed and made comfortable to the smallest detail. See to it that there's a reason beside pious flapdoodle—a real reason why your husband should prefer to keep on with you. Make it unnecessary for him to supplement you with mistresses. Make it absurd for him to think of replacing you and trying again for comfort and companionship and love."

Sophy was speechless with terror at these plain statements of her impending peril.

"You're a young woman," Schulze went on. "You are still intact, despite your efforts to ruin your health and looks. Behave yourself, and you'll soon be all right. Stop stuffing yourself. How can your brain work when it's steeped in the gases of undigested food? How can your body be active and beautiful when it's staggering and sagging under the load of rubbish you thrust into it three times a day—with often a fourth meal at night when the gnawing of ptomaines makes you have the sensation of hunger?"

"That's getting to be my besetting sin—my appetite," moaned Sophy.

"If you had cared as much for your husband's love as you've cared for pies and cake and candy, you'd not be sitting there, weeping over your sorrows. Will

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the human race never learn that its emotions are not in its soul, but in its body? I suppose not, as long as the priests and the poets and the romancers can make a living by flattering it about its heart and its soul, and appealing to its pretenses instead of to its common sense."

"Just write down, won't you, please, exactly what—and how much—and when—I must eat, in order to get thin."

"I'll send you a bill of fare by to-night's mail. Don't hump down in a chair after meals. Stand and walk about for half an hour to an hour. Then, there's the exercise. Ten miles a day—ten real miles, every day, at the *same* hour."

"But I can't *begin* with ten miles," she pleaded.

"No, I suppose not. Three miles the first week, five the second, ten the third. If your husband had taken as poor care of his property—if your maid took as poor care of your dresses, as you've taken of your good looks——"

"And you guarantee a cure? You know my heart is not strong."

"I know nothing of the kind. You haven't yet quite suffocated your heart with fat. Heart disease!" Schulze snorted. "Not one person in a million lives beyond childhood if born with a weak heart. Yet these fool doctors give medicine for 'heart disease' and, when people die, ascribe it to heart failure. The physical heart gives as little trouble as the other one, if the digestive apparatus is right. Do you know that practically all the insanity and absolutely all the suicides—and the murders—and other acts of violence, too, for that matter—are directly due to stomach or intestinal trouble? Disposition is digestion—and

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where the stomach is all right and the disposition all wrong, then the trouble is in the intestines—not in the soul, dear lady. Yes, I'll guarantee to thin you down—if you follow my advice exactly for one year."

So well had his unpalatable but powerful nerve tonic acted upon her that she already felt better, on the way to cure. "I'll follow your advice, never fear," she said, cheerful and grateful. "Doctor, you have raised me from the dead."

"I've told you how to raise yourself from the dead," he replied.

"And I've got sense enough to see it."

"You'd be in an asylum if you hadn't. The trouble with us isn't lack of sense—it's lack of persistence." He stood, shook his head and his forefinger at her half severely, half humorously. "Now, don't you come back here again! I've told you what to do. If you don't do it, I don't want to see you. If you do, I'll discover it as I catch sight of you now and then in the street. But, I've got no time to waste on anybody. I'm seventy, and I can't reasonably count on more than twenty years of active life."

"Seventy!" she exclaimed. "And do you expect to be alive at ninety?"

"I shall be, accidents barred. And at work. Action is the essence of life. To rest is to rust and rot."

But she was not listening. "I've got two months," said she. "He's taking Charley away to hunt in the Northwest. I can do a great deal in two months, can't I?"

"Wonders—wonders," replied Schulze. "If—if—if!"

He clicked the lock of the hall door loudly; she took the hint, glad to escape, but gladder that she had come.

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Instead of hastening to change his clothes for his laboratory work, he paused at the window, watching her enter her carriage and drive away. "Now, there's a case in point," said he aloud, addressing his hideous familiar, the Oriental image. "These stupid, unthinking writers, pandering to the stupid, unthinking public! Plays and novels and poems about the petty, real, essentially ridiculous violations of man's silly little conventionalities of law and morals, when the real strong situations, the real tragedies all center about the immutable laws of the universe. He that sins against conventional morals can laugh, if he is strong enough to shrug at public opinion. But, health—that terminates life and happiness and love and friends and food, clothing, shelter—The soul that sinneth against health, it must die! . . . Poor woman! Driveling out duty when she'd better have been worrying out weight! If the girth had stayed right, there'd have been no need of appeal to the policeman duty. Poor woman! Ignorance! Ignorance! Ignorance and vanity—and superstition!"

His grotesque Oriental confidant echoed him with eternal grin of derision unutterable.

VI

"WHO'S MISS RAEBURN?"

MURDOCK had been gone a month; and still Sophy had not begun. There are always a hundred reasons, excellent reasons, why any venture, great or small, should be put off, should be given up at whatever stage, should not be begun at all. And where vanity is enlisted against action, the strongest will and the most inflexible purpose must hesitate. The rearrangement of the new house—Dumont's Eyre, which Murdock just before his departure had bought as it stood, furnished throughout, including linen and china—and the preparations for moving were Sophy's pretexts for postponing the reconquest of her youth. The real cause, deeper than laziness, was belief in her vanity's reassurance that she was "all right as I am, or at least as good as can be expected at my age and with my natural tendencies." She no longer had before her Murdock's youthful face and figure and ominous reserve; her physical qualms had yielded to the new kinds of nerve pills and digestive tablets she had bought after reading their advertisements and testimonials. To bother about such vanities as personal appearance was unnecessary, was foolish. Was it not even impious?

"The Lord clearly intended me to be large," she reflected. Were not Old Testament and New full of denunciations of vanity? As for health, she decided that the

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patent-pill advertisements were right, that her trouble was altogether nerves, the baleful reaction of her worries and troubles upon her body; there was no connection between her sluggishness, her headaches and sciatica, and the kind and quantity of food she ate. "Schulze's a crank—everybody knows that," reflected Sophy. "I'll trust to nature. God gave the sense of taste to show us what to eat and what not to eat, and He proportioned our appetites to our needs."

So she definitely abandoned what she soon saw was a sinful impulse to transfer her trust from her God to Doctor Schulze; instead of dieting and exercise, she read the Bible a great deal, expanded in pious conversation, included in her resumed morning and evening prayers a petition to the Lord to keep her husband's love for her and remove vanity from his heart—and took pills and powders and liquids for her aches and pains, and ate caramels to remove the taste and help the medicine digest. Thus, her problem was solved, and in the most satisfactory way. If all went well, it was the Lord's will that it should be so; if she did not get answer to her prayer, then the responsibility was with the Lord. Had Sophy not been a religious woman, her laziness would have selected some other of the supernatural scapegoats of self-excuse—fate, for instance, or luck.

Sophy was resigned, but in no very good humor about it. She felt resentful against her deity, felt he owed her some extremely pleasant apology for having created her into these degenerate times. She thought little about abstract matters, yet she could not help realizing that everything was unsettled and unsettling in this modern world. *She dimly saw how these new and there-*

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fore wicked impulses to change were affecting all ages and stations and both sexes, were disregarding the matrimonial and the family barriers—in fact, all the barriers which religion and tradition had established. Husbands and wives no longer had the habit of contentedly and decently growing old together, as unmoved by change as oysters in their deep-lying beds by swing of tide or whirl of tempest. Instead, one or the other, or both, became tainted by this craze for change; and there were scandals, domestic upheavals, divorces. What right had Providence to thrust her into such a devil's stew of a time? Having seen fit to do her this injustice, Providence could hardly do less than see her safely through.

The new house being Sophy's prime reason for not showing distrust in the divine custodian of her destinies, she left all the planning and all the execution to her daughter. She remained seated in her favorite chair, usually with a box of candy at hand; when she was not nursing a headache or an attack of sciatica or neuralgia, she suspended her Bible or her novel, listened to what Norma had to say, and assented, with occasional criticism to give herself the sense of doing the whole thing. But if neuralgia or headache or any other reason made her feel unequal to such arduous labor, she would send Norma away with, "Why do you bother *me*, child, with such trifles? You know I'm not well. You know how hard I've toiled to bring up you children and take care of Charles and the house. It seems to me I've earned the right to a little rest."

And Norma, partly because she was really contrite over her thoughtlessness, chiefly perhaps because she was glad to have a free hand for carrying out her own *teeming and positive* ideas, would say: "I'm sorry,

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mother. You certainly have done more than your share. Is there anything I can do for *you*?"

When Murdock and his son returned, brown and hearty and looking like elder brother and younger, they found the family established in the Eyrie. Norma was fresh and full of enthusiasm; Sophy was haggard, more ample than ever, and completely worn out. As Blagden, before whom she always to a certain extent kept up appearances because he was a formal and most correct Easterner—as Blagden had not come back with her husband and her son, she received them in the loosest and laziest of negligees, her poor health being the sufficient excuse. Murdock's expression, at sight of her, was interesting and significant. He looked at her furtively, with a suggestion of embarrassment or guilt. The kiss which the occasion demanded he gave, not in the usual half-absent, altogether perfunctory way, but with heightened color and a sort of boyish timidity. He noted the signs of ill-health with a solicitude that was exaggerated but sincere.

"You've been working too hard, Sophy!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed. You don't look at all fit," chimed in young Charles. "Your color's something awful, mother."

Sophy, dismayed by her first glance at her young, handsome husband, clear of eye and skin and in perfect health, had shrunk sullenly within herself. At her son's tactless remark, she reddened and her eyes sparkled. But she was too depressed for more than a mere flash-in-the-pan; the contrast between her husband and herself made hitherto sustaining vanity slink away like the treacherous coward that it is. "He's worse steeped than ever in sin and folly and worldliness," she said to herself

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—which was her way of beginning to clear herself of responsibility for what instinct warned her might happen.

Murdock was overwhelmed with remorse; for he felt that, while he had been away enjoying himself and drawing huge splendid draughts from the reservoirs of youth and health, Sophy had been toiling under the many additional burdens his yielding to his daughter's pleading had placed upon her. "I thought there'd be nothing to do but move," said he. He turned reproachfully upon abashed Norma: "You ought to have taken at least part of the work and worry off your mother's shoulders."

The girl hung her head. "Norma has been very good," Sophy hastened to say, magnanimously and with not a qualm. "She has done all she could, and it was a great deal. But of course she's a mere child, and most of the heavy work I had to do myself." Mrs. Murdock gave the martyr's sigh, then added with human peevishness: "I knew how it'd be. That was why I was against taking the house."

Sophy's family had always accepted her theory that she was hard-worked and overworked. Had they not before their very eyes the proof of it in her prematurely worn face and her illnesses that must be—in large part at least—the result of self-sacrifice for home, husband, and children? Before her complaints and implied reproaches they all looked, and felt, thoroughly ashamed of themselves. In the hope of lightening the gloom, Norma suggested timidly: "But now that it's all over, you're glad we moved, aren't you, mother dear?"

Sophy sighed, not discontentedly. "It's certainly roomier and more convenient," she conceded, submitting to her daughter's caress.

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"Well, rather!" exclaimed young Charles, gazing delightedly round the handsome, spacious general sitting room, with its cheerful coloring in furniture, woodwork, and brocaded silk walls. "*This* is something like! My, but we are grand now."

"Wait till you see the rest of the house," cried Norma. "It's a regular palace."

As Mrs. Scarborough had kept the house in condition, and as the Murdocks had bought it as it stood, there had been little refurnishing to do. Norma had shown her father's own executive ability in assembling servants and establishing routine and discipline. Her mother, not trained to the management of any but the most primitive kind of household, had made a failure of the other house, where there had been only five servants. The cooking had been bad, the airing and dusting slipshod; except in Norma's own room, there had not been a closet that was not a wild chaos tumbling out whenever the door was opened. The kitchen had been dirty, and the servants' bedrooms; the housekeeper, finally engaged in desperation, had kept her place by concentrating on Mrs. Murdock's vanity to the neglect of everything else. Roaches had even been seen on the dining-room table, and once they had had a pest of bugs and mice throughout the house. Norma, from the very early age at which her paternal inheritance of strong character and instinct for order had begun to develop, was daily tempted to interfere, did occasionally burst out. But her mother was as jealous of prerogative as people usually are when they are slothful in exercising it; she always quelled her daughter—not a difficult matter, as Norma had also inherited her father's aversion to petty quarrelings and bickerings.

In making the change to the Eyrie, Norma, for the

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first time invested with authority, had had a clash with the housekeeper, Mrs. Theron. That lady had presumed too far upon her "pull" with Mrs. Murdock, had lost the battle and her place. "I am housekeeper now," said Norma to her father, with a great air. Since she had won Joe, a splendid catch and a really grown-up man, her own opinion of herself, never small, had grown hugely. She went stepping about like a matron with a brood, and delivered herself of her book-acquired household wisdom as if it were the ripe result of long years of experience.

"Yes," said Sophy complacently. "I decided Norma must be trained in housekeeping. I don't approve of the way girls are brought up nowadays, ignorant of everything but foolishness. So I'm giving her lessons."

"I'm glad Mrs. Theron has gone," said Charles Junior. "The way she did bootlick mother was something sickening. I've always believed the fire in her room was caused by her being drunk and upsetting the candle."

"Not at all!" cried Sophy, who prided herself upon standing valiantly for her friends. Hers was the conventional interpretation of the word friend—one who flatters us, ignores our faults, panders to our weaknesses, and does as we wish. "Mrs. Theron was a good woman. She had a hasty temper. But who wouldn't, that had been brought up in luxury and had lost it all and had to work for a living, just like a domestic?"

"But she was a——"

Murdock stopped his son with a frown; he had had enough of the ugly reminders of what home in its essence had for years been to him. He turned to his daughter, his stern and somber eyes changing to their more natural *good humor*. "And Joe—how's he?" he asked.

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Norma's face was instantly radiant. "The same—" with a smile—"only more so."

Murdock stroked her hair and kissed her. "I bet Charley a dinner that Joe wouldn't join us."

"Who'd 'a' thought him such a muff?" grumbled Charley. "Now, if you were like Miss Raeburn, I could excuse his giving up all that fun to hang round you. But for a stay-at-home, a house cat, a girl that won't go in for violent exercise because, when she stops, the muscles'll change to fat——"

Norma forgot her dignity of housekeeper and engaged young lady, sprang at him and fell to mussing his hair. "You know entirely too much, Charley boy," she cried. "Who's Miss Raeburn?"

"Ask your father," replied Charley mischievously, as he pushed her away. "Tell what a crack-a-jack she is, pop—elder brother, I should say."

The "elder brother" flushed guiltily; he knew his wife's gaze was suspiciously on him. But he said carelessly enough, "We met Miss Raeburn in the woods. One day, when Blagden and I were at a distance, Charley here missed a cornered grizzly and it closed in on him. She stopped it with a long-range shot."

"Who is she, Charley?" asked Sophy, like a sentinel who has heard a suspicious sound, has decided that there was nothing in it, but is on the way to make sure.

"The finest ever! A peach, but a brick, too. Ask Blagden, when he comes. My, what eyes! They go straight through you, setting you afire as they go. And no nonsense from her, though she makes you feel like talking nothing else. I'd marry her in a minute, if she'd have me."

"But *who* is she?" demanded Sophy. In her best moods, there was latterly little enough trace of her natu-

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ral good traits which the years of self-indulgence and indulgence from all around her had so deeply buried. In her worst moods she was what unchallenged selfishness would in a very little time make of an angel of light. Her eyes, bent upon her husband, showed that she was on the verge of one of her very worst moods.

"I'm telling you who she is," retorted Charley. "She came up there with a maid——"

"Came from where?"

"New York, I guess—Blagden felt sure of it. With a maid and a patent tent like a palace, and a complete outfit for the easy life. She wore as many veils as Norma does, and took no end of care of her hair and skin. And my, *what* hair! Do you remember, brother, the morning you and Blagden caught her drying it—up among the rocks?"

Murdock, pale, with features curiously set, seemed not to hear. Sophy's hands, in her lap, were trembling and fluttering viciously.

"No hardship for her—not a mosquito bite, not a freckle," continued her tormentor. "They all laughed when she first came, but not for long. She'd go anywhere—and shoot!—and fish!— She has Nimrod and old Isaak stung to a standstill."

"It sounds—bold and common," said Sophy, in a suffocated voice.

"So it does," mocked her son. "And she had no chaperon—but the maid. Just the two women and their guides, and not a house or a road within fifty miles. Be careful what you say about her, mom. You may have to receive her as your daughter yet."

If Norma had been observing her mother, she would have tried to change the subject. But she was absorbed in her brother's narrative. "Pretty?" asked she, a lit-

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le jealously. She had an excellent opinion of her own charms and talents; these eulogies were too sweeping not to be ruffling. "Really pretty?"

"Pop and secretary thought so the minute we saw her, and I didn't. But he and Blagden were right. She looks—well, different. You can't forget her eyes."

Both Norma and Charley startled and stared open-mouthed as Sophy burst out at her husband: "What kind of a person is this, anyway?" The voice was utterly unlike hers, and her features were painfully awry and overspread by a purple flush. She had the intense jealousy that goes with exaggerated self-esteem; but in their entire married life she had never before had opportunity to reveal it. Just the right conditions had come about; the apparently harmless chemicals exploded.

The children's eyes turned from their mother to their father. He, suddenly cool and self-possessed, elevated his eyebrows in indifference that was slightly disdainful. "How could anybody add to what the boy has told you? Come along, Norma, and show me the house. I want to see what your mother and you have done."

"You can't put me off, this way!" cried Sophy, with flashing eyes and dilating nostrils. "I've the right to know the kind of people you've been allowing my boy to associate with."

Murdock frowned, froze. "I don't think the boy came to any harm," he said curtly. "I know nothing about her, beyond what he has told you."

"Where does she come from?"

"Really, she didn't say."

"Yet you saw a good deal of her!"

"Well, we did go in bathing with her a few times," put in Charley, with intent to aggravate the situation whose seriousness he did not in the least appreciate.

"And she taught me how to swim overhand—that is, she and I taught the governor." Then, seeing in his mother's countenance that the joke was coming on splendidly, he added: "We got Blagden to tell her we were brothers, and didn't undeceive her till the last day."

"Is this true?" demanded Sophy of her husband.

"Why not?" said he indifferently.

"The governor made me tell her," the boy went on. "I will say that for him. And, my eye! How queer she did act when I gave the snap away. She looked shaky in the steeple for a minute, and then I think she got mad—or something like that. But she pretended not to care. . . . Come to think of it, brother, you must have made quite a hit with her."

Murdock laughed easily. "That's modest of you," said he.

"How long were you with this person?" demanded Sophy of her husband, her manner so insulting that Norma, on the way to the door to escape the distressing scene, turned and, before she could restrain herself, made an appealing gesture toward her.

"Every day for six weeks," answered Murdock.

"And I guess we'd have been with her yet, if she hadn't left us," said Charley. "She went to join her sister at Lake Minnetonka. You remember, it was the day after she found out the truth about us."

"So it was," said Murdock.

"What made you so anxious all of a sudden to have her know?" inquired Charley, as if the strangeness of it had just flashed upon him.

Sophy's expression became so terrible that even Charley was alarmed. "I *never* heard the like—never!" exclaimed she, when she recovered power of speech. "I don't know what to say or think."

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"Really?" said Murdock coldly. And his look checked her, gave her a menacing glimpse of that awe-inspiring mystery within him which she had never fathomed. He addressed his daughter. "Come, Norma. Let's look through the house." Both the children, after frightened wondering glances at their mother, followed him from the room.

But for the collision with his wife, he would probably have noted only casually if at all the ingenious arrangements which Norma had made for the family comfort, certainly would never have thought to inquire where they originated. Like most men he knew little about house-keeping, and that little had not roused his curiosity to inquire further, had rather made him feel that it was wise to ignore domestic economy under pain of increasing his irritations and completing the destruction of any remaining illusion he might have on the subject of home. Now, with the results of Norma's intelligent turning to account of everything in that well-planned, well-equipped house passing in review before him, he began to see that if the business is one half of life the housekeeping is the other half, is the coördinate and equal branch, deserving and demanding equal skill and industry. He was getting concrete illustration of the great truth, so important to civilization yet universally overlooked, that the problem of spending money is as complex, as difficult as the problem of making it.

His silence, as he revolved these new ideas, with their far-reaching implications, made his daughter more and more uneasy. "You don't like it?" she said at last, disconsolately. "And I took such pains to try to please you!"

His face instantly reassured her, and more. "You're a genius," he replied, and in his inexperience he was

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crediting to her all that had been done by their predecessors in the house as well as what she had done. "You've shown me that the word woman has a very different meaning from what I suspected. Joe is getting a great deal better bargain than he dreams."

"That's right, Norma," endorsed Charley with enthusiasm. "You begin to remind me of Juliet Raeburn. This is the sort of thing she'd do."

Murdock apparently did not hear. His face had a wistful, lonely expression as he went on, "And I—we—are losing—" He did not finish. Presently he said, in jest, but not altogether in jest: "I wish I'd had some of this kind of talent to help me at the works. We men are a clumsy, slatternly lot."

"The women are woefully incompetent," said Norma doubtfully, with a venerable air of wisdom and experience. "If it could be arranged, I'd have only men servants. The young women give only a lick and a promise to their work because they're looking forward to trapping some man into supporting them in idleness. As for the older women, they've been demoralized in their youth."

"Men are not so competent as you think," replied Murdock, secretly much amused by Norma's superhuman gravity. "The best of us work poorly enough—little system, little concentration, eyes wandering to the clock."

"But if the men were as worthless as the women—" began Norma.

Murdock laughed. "They would be if they dared—if they didn't have competition to compel them," said he. "Unfortunately for the women, there's no competition among housewives."

"You'd never have caught Joe with your housekeep-

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ing," put in Charley. "A man doesn't marry for that."

"Of course not," said Norma. "No more would a woman marry the best business man among the men that asked her. But a man's own self-respect ought to make him inform himself about his business, just as a woman's self-respect ought to make her educate herself about *her* business."

Charley grinned. "My, but you're smart—ain't she, father? Look out or Joe'll be afraid to marry you. You ought to have a few lessons from Juliet. Now, *she* was smart without airs or bluff."

"Juliet!" cried Norma, chagrined and angry. "You and she *must* have got on!"

Murdock had not heard these last remarks. He was deep in his own thoughts. Here was a girl who represented the new order in women just as he himself represented the new order in men. There was the old-fashioned woman who was more or less competent, not entirely incompetent, to deal with the problems of domestic affairs as they existed under the old order—the order that had been established almost without change, since prehistoric time. And there was the old-fashioned man who could deal well enough with the conditions which existed before the world became one vast coöperating family. But discovery and invention had changed all those conditions, had revolutionized them; and how few were the men and the women who had promptly responded, had educated themselves, had made themselves expert, had put themselves in a position to take full advantage of the gifts science was thrusting upon the race! Murdock had often thought of these things as related to his own affairs—to industry and commerce; he had often had qualms of conscience when he, like the other strong

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and acute heapers up of private wealth, had taken both legitimate and illegitimate advantage of the obstinate and sluggish ignorance of his fellow-men, had used their tenacity in ignorance to make out of them much money for himself. But he had never before noticed this vast other half of the matter—the bearing of the scientific revolution upon woman and the home.

“You have been thinking about—studying—house-keeping a great deal?” he said to his daughter.

“Oh, I’m very ignorant, as yet,” replied she, quite recovered from the setback Charley had given her. “But some day— When I’ve a house of my own, I’m going to see what I can do. You wouldn’t believe how foolish the education they give women is. Why, it’s no education at all. And all the ideas are so false and pretentious—so vulgar—everything for show, for playing the useless lady, for leading a life that doesn’t get anywhere. They call it culture. I call it—rot.”

“Listen to the blue stocking!” cried her brother. “Better not let Joe hear you talk that way.”

Norma gave a confident little toss of the head. “I guess Joe and I understand each other.”

“I doubt it,” retorted Charley. “Nobody was ever yet able to see straight in moonshine.”

They returned to where Sophy was sitting with the smelling salts and a novel—one of those novels written to appeal to the vanity of women by exaggerating their brief, doubtful and dearly-bought triumphs through the passions of men into substantial and important conquests. She did not glance up when the three re-entered the general living room. She made an oppressive silence there; Charley asked Norma to play squash with him, and Norma, with an uneasy glance from her mother to her father, accepted. As they were leaving,

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Charley, genius at tactlessness, said: "Just you wait, Norma, till Blagden ships along the boxes and you see the grizzly Miss Raeburn killed. She gave it to me."

Sophy, startled, set her teeth firmly. But she waited until the children were out of earshot, before saying to her husband: "The more I think of that woman, the more I'm astonished at you." Her voice was peevish rather than wrathful now. In the interval she had recovered her temper, had seen that her explosion was out of all proportion to the provoking cause. "I simply can't believe you know so little about her. And I don't believe she was—respectable."

Murdock moved toward the long window by which Charley and Norma had gone. Halfway he changed his mind, turned. "Sophy," he said in his frankest, most winning manner, "can't we get through even the first day without irritating each other? Come! Let's try to get on together without being always on the edge of a quarrel. It isn't fair to the children. Why, we've nothing to quarrel about."

Sophy refused to meet his gaze. "You'd better go and ask your God to forgive you for the evil thoughts that've been choking up your heart. I can't but feel all this is a judgment sent on me for my carelessness about religion. It has opened my eyes to my duty to God."

Since their marriage, which released them while still in their teens from the stern and strenuous regimen of their pious parents, they had given religion the most meagerly conventional place in their lives. He himself, too busy to face any problem until it faced him, was not sure, or curious even, what he believed, if he believed at all. Theretofore he had never seen or heard anything from her that *indicated more than a perfunctory acqui-*

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escence in the faith in which she had been bred. At these perfervid expressions from her, he stared.

"I've turned to religion," she explained, rather sullenly, as if her sincerity were questioned, "for the strength to bear my trials. But for the aid God has given me I'd have broken down under the burdens He has laid upon me."

"What trials?" he inquired gravely, though he could not keep a slight quiver of suppressed amusement out of his voice. "What burdens?"

"I don't propose to be insulted," replied she. The load that had broken the back of her meek, martyrlike endurance was made up of a multitude of straws of slight and neglect, each light in itself and apparently nothing. She would not let him cleverly discredit it by forcing her to exhibit the straws one at a time. "I have taken my sorrow to God in prayer. He is comforting me."

"What sorrow?" he demanded. Now it was irritation that he was struggling to suppress.

She held to aggrieved silence.

"If there's anything you wish, you've only to ask for it."

Silence.

"Is it with me you're finding fault—with something I've done or failed to do?"

Silence.

"As for—Miss Raeburn——"

She turned her head angrily. "I care nothing about the low woman you neglect your wife and family for."

"Sophy!" He tried to make his tone a remonstrance; in spite of him it was subtly apologetic—and, *without* realizing, she felt it, was stung by it.

"WHO'S MISS RAE BURN?"

"If only vile, carnal things will keep a man to his ty—" She tossed her head and drew in her lips ridly— "I don't feel that God wishes *me* to keep m."

"Was there ever such rubbish since the world began!" cried he. "If anybody in this family ought to ppeal to God for strength, it's certainly I—strength o put up with a whining woman, jealous without ause."

"I—jealous!" Sophy laughed harshly. Her blue eyes were pale and cold-looking. "You flatter yourself. I don't care what you do, so long as you don't flaunt it in your family, and use your own children to help you in your low intrigues."

"Intrigues!" The charge was so unjust that he now felt like outraged innocence. "Intrigues," he repeated in angry disgust. "Idiotic!" And he jammed his fists in the outside pockets of his coat and paced up and down. "Imbecility!"

Sophy pounced upon the advantage. "That's right—insult me. Oh, you think I'm a blind fool. You don't think I realize how you've been contrasting and disparaging your wife, the mother of your children."

Murdock wheeled and faced her with a violent gesture. "To the devil with that 'mother-of-your-children' nonsense!" cried he, in the frank anger that is without venom. "Norma and the boy are as much your children as mine. This is as much your house as mine. I might as justly talk about your being under obligation to me for the money you and they have spent as for you to moan and whimper about what you've done in the way of looking after the house and children. Have you worked hard? At what? And, if you have, *haven't I*? Oughtn't everybody?

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Isn't it good to work? Where's the title to sympathy?"

Mrs. Murdock was looking at him now; her eyes were ablaze with resentment. "So!" she cried, emphasizing her words with tosses of the head. "So! I've done nothing! I ought to be grateful to you for having supported me! I'm worn out, and you want to cast me aside and take another fresh young girl!" Her heavy cheeks—fat, yet with sick hollows in them—quivered. Her broad bosom, upplied and festooned with the lace of her gray negligee, heaved and caved stormily. She burst into tears.

"I never thought such a thing," retorted he. "Be careful how you put those ideas into my head."

Sophy choked hysterically. "O God!" she wailed. "What have I done that such affliction should be sent on me?"

But Murdock was in no mood to be moved by this spectacle. "Look here, Sophy," he said; his face and voice confirmed her in her belief in his heartlessness. "You're not nearly so irrational and unjust as you're pretending. Nobody was ever created with as little common sense as you're trying to make me believe you've got. But I'm not going to be lured into saying the things about you—about our married life—that I might justly say——"

"Instead of coming home to harass and insult your sick wife, you'd better have stayed on with that Raeburn woman."

His anger had passed the molten stage, was getting hard and cold. "As you please," said he tranquilly. "But—just one thing more. I understand perfectly why you are suddenly irritated against me. In the life of everybody who makes a mess of opportunity, there

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comes a time when he or she has to choose between blaming self and blaming some one else for the mess. That me seems to have come for you. And you're trying to make me the chief figure in your scheme for self-exuse."

Sophy did not see it; but instinct warned her that, if she lingered, she might see something which would show her there was another side to this domestic question, and, so, might weaken her sense of self-righteousness. She rose with much dignity. "I'll not listen to such talk!" cried she. "Go to your Raeburn woman!" And she moved toward the door.

He put himself between it and her. Each was looking at the other; their eyes were pitiless—his aggressive, hers passive. "Perhaps I shall!" said he coldly. Then he added, "No, that is unjust to her."

"Insults for your wife. Consideration for your——"

His look and his gesture stopped her. "Instead of insulting her," said he, with a straightforward, inexperienced man's imprudence, "you should be grateful to her for being strong where I might have been weak. Yes, I was tempted—though not by her—no, by you—by our—— But let that pass. Just one thing more. Be careful how you goad me. And, instead of making life hell for yourself and for me, instead of engaging in the lazy business of praying, you'd better bestir yourself and try to make your home comfortable and your family happy. And it wouldn't do any harm to take a bath once in a while—and wash your hair."

She sank into a chair, and her sudden faintness was proof of the insincerity he suspected. Her huge undigested lunch was pressing heavily upon her heart. "Call my maid!" she gasped. "I'm ill—ill."

He looked at her, sneered, rang the bell. "If I ate

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the things you do, and took as little exercise, I'd be dead," said he, and left her.

He remembered that in John Dumont's day the library and the rooms adjoining it had been his private suite. Murdock had his valet change them back to living suite again. And that night he established himself there alone.

VII

DANGERFIELD'S

NEITHER Sophy nor Murdock expected, or intended, the new arrangement to be permanent. With him, anger against her speedily changed to anger against himself. He had always been a keen and, what is rarer still, an accurate observer of human nature — particularly, for reasons of self-guidance, of its disaster-breeding weaknesses. He had not failed to note the universal passion of self-excuse; and, warned by its ravages, he had made his inflexible rule to assume that wherever his affairs went wrong he himself and no other was primarily and chiefly at fault.

Thus he was soon admitting to himself that, but for his stupid, tactless confession about Juliet Raeburn, Sophy would not have provoked him into a painful quarrel in which he had uttered truths the more inassailable because they were truths—for there lay their clinging sting. A short time, and he was going still further in the direction of just self-judgment. He looked with less lenient eyes his month in the woods with Juliet Raeburn—twenty-seven days of daily, unconventional, untrammelled association with a beautiful, more beautiful, young woman, a woman such as he had never since assumed had no existence outside his dreams. He recalled how they had deceived themselves as to the nature of their feeling toward each other until the

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very last day of her stay; recalled the catastrophe—~~he~~ and she fishing far upstream and alone—she slipped off the wet rock—how, to save her from the rapids, he caught her in his arms—and kissed her—or did their lips meet halfway?—and he learned his own secret—and—yes—her look revealed to him her secret. Recalling these things, he felt—though he was thrilling and tingling as always at the memory of them—he now felt there was but the one reason for the dismal fiasco of his homecoming. He called it a fiasco, because he had come resolved to put Juliet out of his thoughts, since there was no fit place for her in his life, and resolved to make the best of things and “do his duty” by Sophy.

In face of these facts of his own responsibility, his attitude toward Sophy became apologetic and conciliatory—in the guarded way which prudence imposes in dealing with human nature, so prone to misinterpret consideration as weakness. As for Sophy, inertia—that teeming source of reputations for good nature and generosity—made it impossible for her to persist in anything, especially in such a ravenous demander of fresh fuel as hate, without strong and steady pressure from without. After the habit of unreflecting humanity, she accepted the thing-that-is as permanent, believed change highly improbable, all but impossible—this, when the world’s sole certainty is that the thing-that-is will not abide. Her husband was once more at home; at home he would remain, and safe from wiles; it was meet and proper that husband and wife should occupy the same bed; a few days, a few weeks at most, and the interrupted order would reestablish itself.

But the days, the weeks, the months went; and the temporary separation slowly insinuated into a custom, *satisfactory* to both.

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In spite of his penitence, Murdock, though under less provocation than ever before apparently, as he and Sophy met only at lunch and at dinner, was nevertheless not occasionally but constantly in the critical mood toward her stagnation in the old ways. In vain he accused himself of being unfair, because of his, at times fierce, at times wretched, always sternly rebuked longing for another woman. In vain he told himself he was finding fault with what was still the regular and the expected among respectable women; he made no impression upon the outraged and now morbid sensibilities of his physical fastidiousness. Also, he began clearly to see that this physical fastidiousness of his was in reality the deep-down ultimate moving cause of their cleavage. His analytic mind went back through the years to its earliest beginnings—went back to apparently trivial happenings which memory had filed, without his then in the least comprehending their significance. These happenings were of the kind that would, if he had thought of them at all, have been approved by him at the time as evidence that she was a modest, moral woman, with no taint of carnal-mindedness. But he realized now that his nerves had not approved. What a man respects in a woman has a more or less conventional origin; what he likes springs from sources far deeper—from the very heart of the heart of his real nature.

Sophy, for her part, was no less content with the new order of separate beds and separate apartments. She now realized—of course, without analyzing her feelings—that Murdock had long been an irritating intrusion. His modernizing of his personal habits had not been consciously noted by her; yet she had felt it *hardly the less* keenly. The first impulse of humanity's

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anger toward new truth of any kind comes from the laziness that shrinks from the labor of learning; but the anger abides because the new truth is essentially a caustic criticism of the old error and of all who persist in it. Murdock's evening bath and morning shower, his fastidiousness—"crankiness" she thought it—about his shirts and underclothes had not roused her to imitation. Was she not perfectly clean and fresh? Why waste time and effort? Why open the pores perilously wide? Why wear out clean clothes by having them laundered when they didn't need it? Was she not more particular than most, as particular as it was necessary for a clean woman to be, as particular as it was respectable for a pure woman to be? His new habits had merely irritated her against him; it had never occurred to her to ask herself why she would be ashamed to have it known that she bathed and changed but once a week—at most.

Thus, the innovation of separate beds and separate apartments, giving her more room, absolute freedom from eyes that seemed to her to pry and censure, soon contented her so completely that she would have been more averse, if possible, than he to going back to the old order. And, despite her almost incessant depression and frequent attacks of neuralgia and headache and back-ache, she became less uncertain of temper.

"Mother's disposition seems to be improving," said Charley to Norma. "She's more what she used to be when we were children. You've noticed it?"

Norma admitted she had. "I guess she likes the new house better," was her explanation.

"And father's, too," continued Charley. "There was a time after we got back from the woods last year when I thought his nerves were going to pieces. But

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's himself again. So many couples are acting up nowadays that I was afraid—" He ended without venturing to put his fear into words.

"What a silly you are!" cried Norma, the more indignant because she had herself been secretly striving with that same fear.

"Well—you never can tell," maintained her brother.

"Not *our* father and *our* mother."

"No, I suppose not," assented Charley. Then, after a silence, he added, in a vague impersonal way, "I tell you, Norma, you do well to be mighty particular about yourself—about your hair—and skin—and bathing—and—all that. The day's gone by when a female can afford to think she's fresh simply because she has washed her face and sleeked her hair down a bit."

No answer from Norma—unless deepened color and a glance to make sure he was filially unconscious of his train of thought were answer.

Presently Charley dismissed the subject, from *his* mind at least, with "Well, anyhow, everything's all serene again."

Serene was precisely the word. The separate sleeping apartments seemed to have been just what was needed to reunite Sophy and Murdock in a matrimonial *modus vivendi* insuring peace and permanence. In fact, the very act which thus seemed to have brought about a reconciliation had made reconciliation impossible. The husband and wife who sleep side by side may bore, may irritate, may enrage each other, may quarrel bitterly, may go widely separate ways from rising to bedtime; still, the bond of union will be there, as irksome perhaps as was that of the Siamese twins, but also as indissoluble. If Sophy and Murdock had loved each other, if there had even been the occasional play of passion's fitful

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flame upon the matrimonial hearth, a brief separation would have brought them together again, more close than in years. But the content of both in the new order, was proof that the hearth was dead and cold. And, no longer together in any hour of intimacy or real privacy, they would never have the chance to become reconciled; they would remain strangers, the further apart for the studied politeness of each to the other.

Taking society in its entirety, deep and strong attraction, resulting in unity of mind and heart, plays but an insignificant part in marriage. Instead, we find a vast variety of *modi vivendi* for the sake of appearances or of the children or of some other external force or bogey forbidding divorce. Even marriages that pass for happy are often of some one of these makeshift varieties. Because a conventional couple, blunt of nerves and unanalytic, and undisturbed by serious temptation to wander, regard themselves and are regarded as successfully married, it by no means follows that they are. Disease is not always accompanied by pain; some of the very worst diseases—those of steady, relentless decay, for instance—are painless. The disease in the married life of Murdock and Sophy had passed from the acute stage to the chronic. And they, and their children, thought it cured.

Toward the winter's end, when the time came for the journey to New York to assemble the trousseau, Mrs. Murdock's courage failed her. "You'll have to go by yourself and stop with Joe's sister, after all," said she to Norma. "I haven't the strength. It'd kill me. I've worked and slaved too hard. Now, I've got to pay for it."

"Stuff, mother, stuff!" protested Charley, home for

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the Easter holidays. "It'll do you a world of good—and you needn't set foot on the ground."

"I must stay here and look after things. With my neuralgia and this big house on my hands——"

"Norma'd be miserable at Mrs. Houghton's," pursued Charley. In a moment of extreme irritation Norma had confided to him her antipathy for Joe's artificial, supercilious New York sister, who was chagrined by her brother's choice of a wife remote from "the only people worth while," and did not trouble herself to conceal her chagrin.

"No, I sha'n't mind her," hastily interposed Norma. "Really, I sha'n't." Love had softened her uncompromising arrogance and egotism of youth into sweetness and consideration and even conciliation. "I know she doesn't approve of me at all. But she's got tact. For two or three weeks we'll get on like turtledoves."

In the bottom of her heart she was relieved that her mother was not going. A woman who knows how to shop dislikes having anyone along. Important work, to be done well, must be done alone; and in such delicate matters as style, taste, bargaining, the presence of another causes confusion and indecision, raises the prices, strengthens the hands of the shop people in forcing on a woman things she does not quite like and will ever afterward hate. Mrs. Murdock was a particularly trying person on a shopping expedition. The clerks always at once "sized her up," flattered her into accepting the goods they were most eager to be rid of, at prices of their own fixing.

As Murdock was in Nevada, looking at mines, Norma went East with only her maid, found Mrs. Houghton sweetly amiable, and pursued her shopping alone and unmolested. When her father turned up in New York,

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on one of his frequent business trips, she breakfasted with him at his hotel. He seemed a different person in New York, more as he used to be when playing with her was his only relaxation. "I'm going to break my rule," said she, "and take *you* shopping with me."

"Quite unnecessary," replied he. "No matter what it is, you shall have it. Go right ahead."

"You're too suspicious," retorted Norma. "I simply want you to see a shop that's worth while—something quite new—and very interesting. It's Dangerfield's."

"Dangerfield?"

"Dresses and hats."

Murdock laughed, shook his head vigorously. "Not I!"

But his daughter persisted. "It's much stranger and more interesting—especially to a man—than that lunatic Stock Exchange you took me to last time we were here. Lots of men go. Really, father—" She hesitated and smiled as she used the age-suggesting word in connection with a man who was so young in every way— "I'd not ask you if it weren't worth while."

Norma was pretty, was charmingly dressed; when with her, he felt less lonely, less restless. He yielded. He forgot his reluctance as they descended before the Holland brick and marble palace just off Fifth Avenue, in every way like a private house. As the great door was swung back by the big colored man in livery, Murdock asked her: "Who is Dangerfield?"

"It's merely an old trade name, I believe. There's no Dangerfield. The business is run by a stock company."

They were at the foot of a marble staircase guarded by two colossal bronzes, female figures bearing aloft elec-

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tric-light globes. To the left was a reception room, to the right a tea room. "This looks as if we had got into somebody's residence by mistake," said Murdock. "Where's the business?"

"Come along," replied Norma, starting up the stairs. "It's here, all right. We're early. Nobody but me ever comes before eleven or half past. Besides, the season's almost over."

The stairway branched to the right and to the left, meeting again at the second-floor landing to form a balcony. There, a fountain was tossing high a tinkling spray from the midst of flowers; and festoons of flowers hung over the balustrade. Murdock followed his daughter to the right into a salon with pillars of variegated marble, superb tapestries to match, several—neither too many nor too few—large pieces of simple furniture. The central oval of the ceiling was a fresco representing Minerva, goddess of wisdom, smiling round the edge of a folly mask. They crossed this salon to the corresponding room to the left; in its doorway they got the first glimpse of Dangerfield as a business establishment. On tables, benches, chairs, sofas were flung in gorgeous profusion dresses and dress materials, cascades and rivulets and pools of soft color. Beyond, Murdock saw a similar room that in vista gave the effect of a conservatory filled with birds and flowers of every hue. "Hats," explained Norma. "There is still another salon for the millinery department. It's on the floor above, where the fitting salons are."

"No wonder you women are so eager to get hold of money and spend it," said Murdock. "I'm amazed at your moderation."

Moving about the room at whose threshold they stood were a dozen girls. Murdock saw that there was

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not a homely one among them. "I'm willing to bet anything you like that the boss here is a man—and that he isn't married."

"You lose," said Norma. "It's a woman."

"Then she must be young and pretty—and generous."

"Indeed she is," assented Norma, with enthusiasm.

His wandering glance went from face and figure to face and figure until it lit and paused fascinated upon a woman on a stepladder, delving into a big box of ribbons. Her long, supple back was toward him; he was as little the expert in woman's dress as the average American man, yet he noted her beautiful simple morning dress of dark-green cloth, with hat and stockings and shoes to match—one of those unobtrusive costumes whose costly perfection shows in its being unobtrusive and in the surprises of pleasures its intelligent and elegant details yield to the critical eye. Murdock did not note those details, but he appreciated them; any spectator must take pleasure in a work of real art, however unconscious he may be of the source of his pleasure, the thousand trifles which, as Michelangelo said, sum up into perfection. Some details, however, he did consciously note—the fit of her shoes and their neatness, especially about the heels—that her skirt was straight, even all round, at the hem—how thick and crisp and clean her hair was, and how beautifully arranged at the back, the clear-cut simplicity of the lines of waist and hips. "There's a woman who takes the right sort of care of herself," he said to himself with absolute positiveness, though he had only her back to judge by.

"She's the head of the establishment," said Norma in an undertone, her gaze where his was, "but she works just like the rest. I think she's the cleverest woman I

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ever met in my life. The girls say she's rich and that she made it all herself. Yet she's still very young." Norma sighed; she had had her own dreams of independent accomplishment. "There's a barrel of money in millinery and dressmaking, if one can get and keep the right people."

The young woman turned to descend. She smiled at Norma; then her glance, keen, quick, traveled on to Murdock. Norma saw the strangest look flash into her wonderfully expressive gray eyes—a look of shyness and joy and fear—saw the color leave her cheeks, her lips even. This for an instant only. She descended, advanced with extended hand. "Good morning," said she to Norma. "So, you've brought your father with you."

Norma laughed. "How did you know?" cried she. "I thought you'd think he was my—my brother."

At this Miss Raeburn's expression became so peculiar that Norma glanced at Murdock. His scarlet face, his uncertain eyes, his nervous attempts to readjust the line of his lips, made her turn quickly upon Miss Raeburn again. Then she stammered, "Oh, it was *you* father and Charles met out West! I never thought of it before." And so confused was she that not until afterwards did she wonder how she had happened to think of it then—just then.

"Yes," said Murdock, a notable rigidity in his tone and manner.

Miss Raeburn extended her hand. At the touch of her fingers upon his palm, his eyes contracted and his lips compressed. "How is your son?" she asked, but did not look at him.

"Why didn't you speak of it?" exclaimed Norma, struggling with constraint and embarrassment. "You saved Charley's life."

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"You mean, I did him out of his first grizzly."

"You might have told me!"

"Your father will explain to you why that would have been against sound business principles. If you'll wait in the salon a moment, I'll send some one to take you up to the fitters." And Miss Raeburn nodded and smiled, her manner perfect, but in her dark-gray eyes a look that roused in Norma a feeling of suspense and—yes—of dread. She turned away, gave several orders to as many girls, disappeared into the millinery department.

Norma and Murdock retreated to the main salon and seated themselves. Norma, coming out of a deep study in which she had been fitting certain scattered fragments of memory to what she had just seen, ventured a curiously timid glance at him. He was gazing tranquilly into space, with the far-away look characteristic of men of thought and action, even when engrossed in what is going on immediately round them. The average man, an observer of surfaces only, looks as if he were seeing surfaces; the rare man looks as if he were penetrating through surfaces into realities—he looks not only at but through. As the girl was eagerly seeking reassurance from the ideas her intelligence had been forcing upon her against the protests of her loyal heart, she hastened to find it, though in fact his features expressed simply inscrutable calm. There are many, older and more experienced than Norma, who fancy that surfaces are truthful sign boards; most of us, all our lives through, accept a facial expression or a spoken word, even from an oft-convicted practitioner of indirection, at its full seeming value. Norma was completely reassured by Murdock's unruffled tranquillity.

"How queer Miss Raeburn acted!" said she.

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"Yes?" absently from Murdock, when it was obvious that she was waiting for a reply.

"So, your and Charley's spirit of the wilderness is a New York dressmaker. How Charley will feel! I know he suspected she was a Russian grand duchess *incog*."

No comment from Murdock; no indication that he heard.

"Well, she certainly is beautiful, and in such an unusual, strange way. And did you ever see any human being so well taken care of? She's perfect throughout—and not a bit stiff or set, either. That's the difference between the well-got-up lady and the well-got-up not-lady. Oh, she's the real thing."

Nothing from Murdock.

"No wonder even Charley, who never sees anything, noticed her eyes," she went on. "But, then, she's unusual, through and through. All the girls here worship her, and at the same time they're afraid of her—afraid of her criticisms—that's all. They say she's always gentle and polite."

Miss Raeburn was the last subject Norma wished in instinctive prudence to talk about. But she was upset, hysterical, and her tongue ran on: "She's of a good family in the western part of the State. Her father died; she took her share of the estate, came to New York. That was less than ten years ago. She comes in a grand auto every morning exactly at nine and doesn't leave until half past six. She built this place last year—designed it throughout, with a little aid from a friend of hers—a woman architect named Siersdorf."

"I've heard of her," said Murdock.

Norma, disconcerted by this evidence that he was

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listening, and listening attentively, again tried to stop herself. But she felt excited, felt she must talk, and on she went, at the only subject about which any thoughts would come. "She—Miss Raeburn, I mean—has a wonderful little house overlooking the park. She doesn't seem to have any social life, or to want any. I guess her real life is too full for social friends—they're great time-wasters. Sometimes I think, that's about all they are—taking one's time and feeling one for favors. She's got an old maid sister who lives with her—and—and that's all anybody seems to know."

"Probably all there is to know," said Murdock. "I must get downtown. See you at dinner."

He put on his gloves, took his hat and stick, rose, all with his wonted languid deliberation—that manner led his fellow beings far away from suspicion of the fiery, inflexible nature beneath. Norma was watching him closely. She found nothing unusual in his expression, nothing to justify her feeling of impending catastrophe. Still, she could not banish it; and, as he went, she looked after him and fought against an impulse to go with him.

As he slowly descended the main stairway, a white mahogany door to the left of the entrance suddenly swung open. Miss Raeburn herself issued from the office—for it was her office—and began a hurried ascent. He paused. She did not see him until she was within a few steps of him. She hesitated; two spots of color burned for an instant in her cheeks. Then, with an inclination of the head that might have been an avoidance of his gaze or might have been a bow, she was hastening on.

"Can't you give me one moment—after all these months?" he said. His tone of almost humble entreaty

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sounded strangely in his own ears; for they had never heard it before.

She came to a full stop, and with eyes down stood waiting. Her figure was of the kind called French—the firm, small, swelling bust, the slender neck and arms and hips—a figure so slight that the strength and endurance he had seen in the Northwest wilds seemed incredible. Her skin was pale olive, firm and delicate and clear. Her dark hair, not too fine to arrange well, had the sheen and the waviness that mean vitality. As she stood there without motion, not even her bosom responding to her breath, she was in manner the direct opposite of her usual self—of the woman he had known in the woods. For repose was as foreign to that woman as to a humming bird in a flowering garden; her movements were habitually quick, almost impatient, and, as he well remembered, her restless gaze searched her surroundings incessantly as if she were seeking something which must be found, and found speedily; when she greeted anyone, it had been with the darting glance of the ardent temperament, conscious of the brevity of life and eager for its joys—the glance that seems to say, “Is it *you* I’ve been seeking?”

He gazed at her silently, drinking her in. At last her eyelids fluttered and her eyes rose; but they avoided his face. “I’m sailing in the morning,” said she, her voice even but suggesting a ferment deep down. “I’m extremely busy, and——”

“Juliet,” he interposed in that calm slow way of his that could yet be so intense and inevitable, “it wasn’t our fault—the beginning. The very day I realized, I had Charley tell you about me. And I’ve tried—honestly. We’ve both tried. It’s folly—useless, too. That month of happiness—it was a prophecy—a foretaste—

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Now that I've found you again, I'll not go on without you!"

She trembled, paled, leaned against the balustrade. Her bosom was no longer still.

"You can't deny. A while ago—on the ladder—when you turned—Juliet, I *saw*!"

Her eyes suddenly blazed upon him, made him shrink. "Forgive me," he muttered. "If you knew—if you knew!"

Her look softened. "Murdock," she said with gentleness—it was the name by which she had called him toward the last in their comradeship of the wilderness, and at the sound of it his head lifted and his gray-blue eyes lighted up—"Murdock, you know we have nothing to say to each other that can be said. Nothing you ought to say or I ought to hear." She extended her hand; and her eyes, sweet as her tone, were also as resolute. "Good-by."

He took her hand, let her draw it quickly away. He made no effort to detain her as she fled up the stairway and was gone, light and swift as those beautiful birds of the wilderness they both loved.

VIII

VIOLA

NORMA brought to dinner next evening the news that Miss Raeburn had sailed. "I didn't see her again, but she left a very friendly good-by for me with Miss Wilmot." Norma smiled mischievously. "Nothing for you or Charley."

Murdock forced a smile, returned to the gloom in which she had found him. In the moods of men and women about each other reason plays no part. All that day he had been embittered against Juliet Raeburn and contemptuous of the first emotions her refusal to listen to him had inspired. Few men—and fewer women—appreciate that woman has value as woman greater than her appeal to the senses, that the feminine can satisfy a need deeper than passion's gusty clamor. The dim realization of this truth which Juliet Raeburn had for the moment roused in Murdock soon waned before passion; for, man being primarily an animal, appetites, so long as they are unappeased, will take precedence over aspirations. In the sharp and cynical reaction, he felt that she tricked him with well-sounding words when he had so sorely needed bread—had even humbled himself to beg for it! Up rose his pride of the master man and exhibited its wound. Their destiny should have been for him to decide; how fatuously he had helped her to mount a pedestal of

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conventional morality, and had fallen down and worshipped—"like a jackass of a Tom Berkeley, with his pale, cold Florence." How meekly he had yielded to her; had let her take control, choose her own part, assign him his! Why, the meekest in the docile human herds he regarded with good-humored pity and contempt, would have made at least a bleat of protest. And he had not even thought of bleating!

He brooded throughout dinner, drove Norma to the Houghtons in somber silence. On the way back to the hotel alone he suddenly burst out: "She has conquered me! I have no power over her—none!" Judging himself and her by the standards that had been his in all his active years, he felt her despising him—"and I deserve it. I let her make a fool of me." Was she not captor? Was he not captive, bent to the dust before her under the chains of desire? "No woman really wants to win, wants the man to lose, in that sort of contest. If he lets her win, she thinks he's even weaker than she—and so he is, by God!"

As he stood at the elevators, about to ascend to his rooms, Berkeley and his wife came up. "Ah, *there* you are!" cried Berkeley. "I was just getting ready to hunt for you. . . . Florence, go to the apartment. Charles and I must finish our business to-night." He winked covertly at Murdock.

Murdock glanced from the husband to the wife and back again. Berkeley's full, thick face was a not unattractive though frank exhibit of the easy-going sensuality that takes life in huge draughts, careless of quality so long as there is quantity. Florence, on the other hand, had—so it seemed to him, in the vividness of face-by-face contrast—the expression that comes

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from finer, more discriminating tastes, from living in the intellect rather than in the body. To him, reading coldness into her blondness, she had always been a typical instance of the sort of woman all men approve, most men like to have for wife, but no man dares or cares passionately to love. Berkeley could not possibly feel at home with her. Murdock wondered how he had ever got near enough to her to become engaged, to marry.

"Here's a car, Florence, my dear," said Berkeley.

Her lips smiled at Murdock, as he and she shook hands, but her eyes shot scorn and disapproval.

"Wait till to-morrow, Tom," said Murdock, "I'm tired."

"No, to-night," insisted Berkeley. And, as he hurried his wife into the car, "Don't stay up for me, my dear."

"I sha'n't," replied she curtly, her contemptuous, coldly disapproving eyes on Murdock.

As the car vanished upward, Berkeley gave a huge sigh of relief. "Now!" said he.

"Now—what?"

"I'm the bad boy—and it's recess. . . . Handsome woman, my wife, isn't she?"

"Very."

Berkeley chuckled. "It's a fine thing to have a wife that everybody regards as the model of just what a wife should be. But— It's a fine thing to live in a grand palace—high ceilings, big rooms, huge halls—a fine thing from the standpoint of other people, but beastly cold and draughty and cheerless for the man that lives there—" Tom chuckled again— "if he is damn fool enough really to live there, and doesn't have another place where he's comfortable—and at home."

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There Tom winked at Murdock and burst out laughing.

They went to the café, and Berkeley mused and smiled over a cordial. "Cheer up!" he finally said to Murdock. "You're coming with me. I've a date—I'd told *her* I had to see you."

"She knows better."

"Certainly. She knows me to a T—she does. But things must be kept smooth." He laughed. "Queer, isn't it? She doesn't want me about. I bore her even more than she bores me. Yet it irritates her to have me amuse myself. I'm sorry, but I can't oblige her. Every time I think what a long time dead I'll be, I get a move on."

"You're riding straight for a nasty scandal."

Berkeley gave an indifferent shrug. "I'm riding straight to amuse myself. *She*'ll keep out of my path"—a wicked smile peered round the edge of his jovial mask, and vanished—" *She* don't want to be run over. I respect her, I'm glad she's my wife; she's welcome to anything money'll buy. But not *me*, old man—not by a damn sight! I have *some* say about myself. As a free American citizen, I've got my constitutional rights—to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"And *her* rights?"

"Of course." Berkeley waved his hand generously. "Don't she assert them—all the rights she's got? When a woman and a man marry, the man agrees to support her and their offspring, and in exchange for that she agrees to—behave herself. A woman's virtue is all there is to her, so far as marriage is concerned. . . . Do I ever bother about married women? No, indeed, I pay for what I get; I

despise a man that takes what another man's paying for. And a woman that cheats ain't fit to live. That's good, business man's honor, isn't it?"

Murdock simply looked at him. Berkeley's way of stating the case revolted him. Yet, he could not dispute that it seemed to fit the facts of life. "I'm a fool of a sentimentalist," he said to himself. "I ought to be learning sense, after what my nonsense has just cost me."

Berkeley paid for the drinks. "We must go," said he. "There'll be somebody for you. Those kind of girls always ring in an extra or so, when they've got a free spender on the string. And I don't care what it costs, so long as I have a good time. Cheer up, old man! Don't look as if you'd lost the only girl you ever loved."

Murdock bit his lip. The arrow stung, and the fact that such an arrow from such a source should sting made him despise himself.

"The peach crop's always good and always ripe in little old New York, as the song says. Come on!"

"No," said Murdock. His tone was final—from habit of refusing such invitations. But he was hesitating; to be alone meant to be prey to the pain that was eating at him like a fire—the pain of baffled desire. "Why not?" he said to himself. Perhaps he would find some consolation, a quietus, for this passion that was challenging his self-mastery. "Why not?" he repeated, defiantly, galled that anyone should seem to have dominion over him.

"Come on, old man," urged Berkeley. "The trouble with you is that you concentrate too much. Relax! Relax! God, it'd be hard on you, if you ever got

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the one-woman bee in your bonnet. You'd go, hell bent."

Murdock's involuntary straightening and smile of defiance betrayed the boyishness which the man who has always had his own way never loses and, in certain moods, falls easy victim to.

"Now, I— A man that takes women seriously is a damn fool, and nobody knows it better than they do. I never yet saw the woman with any experience who didn't despise the man that took her seriously. Of course, *they* like it. Who doesn't like it when somebody, anybody, falls flat and says, 'For God's sake, walk on me!' But they despise the man and keep themselves for the chap that treats 'em like the dirt under his feet. Come along, Murdock. You can leave if you don't like it."

Yes, he must make an outlet for the flood menacing him with destruction. "I will not play the fool for her!" he muttered. Then aloud, "Very well. Let's be off."

"Good business," cried Berkeley, starting up briskly. "Gad, what a swell you look!" This with an admiring glance at Murdock's simple, beautiful pearls and well-cut waistcoat and collar. Even his sable overcoat seemed finer and more elegant than Berkeley's, though, in fact, it had cost a good many thousands less.

"There's nothing slow about *you*, Tom," replied Murdock.

"Not bad, are they?" said Berkeley, gazing complacently at his diamond-set studs and waistcoat buttons before he closed his ostentatious coat over them. "It may be vulgar, but, damn it, I do like shiners. Pearls are more *your* style. Old fellows like me have

to have something that will dazzle the eyes of the girls when they try to look at our hollows and creases."

Berkeley's electric brougham rushed them up Broadway, bright from its hundreds of illuminated signs and show windows, but with sidewalks swept clean of the usual throngs by a wind straight and stiff from the north and cyclonic in that cañon of skyscrapers. The brougham was tight closed, and Berkeley and Murdock were in fur to the chin; but the dampness in the wind penetrated to the very bones.

"God, this is fierce," grumbled Berkeley. "But it's heaven beside the South *en famille*, or the stupor out home. I'd rather be a beggar in the Tenderloin than a billionaire in the backwoods. Why, as I lie in bed here, I say to myself, 'The show's still on. You could join any minute.' And out where we come from, nothing but the moaning in the trees and dull people doddering over stale gossip." Tom half turned, laid his hand on Murdock's arm, and with a sudden change to serious, said: "Don't misunderstand me, Murdock. I'm all for the home and purity—in its proper place. I've got a strong sense of my duty to society."

"Overpowering," said Murdock.

"I mean it. I've no patience with these men that take duty flippantly and get divorces. I tell you, a man that gets a divorce from his wife to marry some other woman is an enemy to religion and society."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir—it's immoral. *That's* real immorality. Let him have his fling—that's nature. But if he's a decent man, he'll not bring marriage and the home in disrepute by divorce."

"Where are you taking me?" demanded Murdock, irritated by these views, and chilled out of conceit with

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an adventure that now seemed to him more worthy of college boys than of men.

"Right here," said Berkeley.

The brougham was swinging in to the curb. The big carriage opener—a huge button-plastered coat and vast fur collar and cockaded top hat—caught a glimpse of Berkeley's face. "Out of the way, there!" he shouted at the drivers of the line of vehicles, as he rushed to the curb, and "Don't block the sidewalk!" to a group of loungers. With a pompous flourish he opened the brougham and made a low bow. "All right, Mr. Berkeley!" cried he.

"You, first," said Berkeley to Murdock. He had a dollar ready for the man who was giving him such a conspicuous reception; he was not concealing his pleasure at being thus acclaimed.

"Do you want your electric to wait, Mr. Berkeley?" asked the carriage caller.

Berkeley nodded assent. "We may want to go a little farther uptown, after a while," he explained to Murdock.

They pushed in at the revolving door, into the anteroom, crowded with men and women in evening dress, some putting on, others divesting themselves of wraps—coats and cloaks of silver fox and ermine and sable, real and imitation, wraps of silk and thick soft cloth, white, silver, delicate shades of blue and dove and pink. The women were wearing great plumed hats and much jewelry. From the main room came the joyous beat of a popular air; there were odors of strong perfumes, of wine, of fine tobacco. There was much laughter, a taking shimmer of bright eyes, of dazzling teeth framed in pretty lips ready, eager for kisses; a stimulating exhibit of well-shaped, well-cared-for

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bodies; the complexions of the women had that blooming smoothness which comes only from incessant care. A garden, indeed; gay, brilliant, inviting. The somberness over Murdock's features lifted somewhat, though he still looked gloomy beside the boyish delight of his companion, who had lost the last of his never obtrusive signs of sedate man of family. His grizzled mustache seemed rakish, his gaze roamed eagerly, greedily, and he was breathing deeply, and sparkling as if he were inhaling pure oxygen. From time to time the end of his long, abrupt, rather pig-like nose twitched quickly, sensitively, and his eyes glistened, as if in rooting in this rich, rotten loam he had turned up a truffle. He saw Murdock observing him, amused yet envious.

"Now this," said he, "is living! God! I feel like a fat woman as she sheds her corsets. Ah! There they are!"

Down the stairway before them were coming two young women, beautifully dressed, the taller in white cloth, the shorter in pale gray. The taller was curiously thin, almost emaciated, yet not angular. Her figure seemed to be moving freely within her garments, constantly suggesting itself and its separateness from them and its desire to escape them. Murdock's eyes leaped; there was a physical resemblance to Juliet Raeburn in this free, sensuous girl—a remote resemblance, but strong enough to remind him, to set desire's acid to eating fiercely again.

"Hello, Viola!" exclaimed Berkeley, beaming on her. "I hoped you'd be here. I've brought my friend, Mr. Murdock, to meet you." Then he turned to the shorter, the plump girl in pale gray. With twitching *end of nose and twinkling eye*, he devoured

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her charms of oval, soft face and sumptuous figure; his thick lips grew moist. "Howdy, Jessie," said he, his sensualist's fingers feeling up and down her arms. "You're looking all to the good to-night. Let's go in to supper."

Jessie smiled at Murdock and the four went two and two into the main room, keeping to the side of the room where the perfume was strongest and the laughter loudest and the display of dresses and jewels most extravagant. The other side was filled with a quieter kind of men and women, apparently come as hungry-eyed or hungry-hearted spectators of the free and prodigal life of New York fashionable "after-dark society." As the four sat at a table well situated for seeing and being seen, Murdock felt isolated. Berkeley and the two women were busily looking about, nodding to acquaintances, commenting on the various celebrities, the men for the most part known to both kinds of fashionable society, the women celebrated in the gayer kind or on the stage or both. As soon as they seated themselves, a waiter had brought a silver champagne cooler and glasses, had drawn the cork and filled the glasses. Berkeley made everybody drink; Murdock observed that he was himself careful barely to touch the delightful but deadly wine to his lips. All through the supper he was urging on the two women to drink, was compelling it, and was himself refraining. This evidence of calculation, this deliberate exploiting of the beauty and the vivacity of the young women at the expense of their youth and health, jarred on Murdock's less selfish nature. It reminded him how, in business, Berkeley, always jolly and equal with the men, and popular with them, was yet always spurring on the foremen to wring the last drop of

energy from their muscles that there might be more and quicker dollars for him. Here, in the same plausible disguise of joviality, was the same merciless selfishness, so profitable, so necessary to success in a society whose law is the survival of the shrewdest. He was buying from these girls their looks and their spirits and their youth, and he was exacting the last penny's worth of what he regarded as his own. When they should be worked out—Why, the price he was willing to pay would buy him more youth and more beauty and more laughter—and all the time he was shrewdly husbanding his own vitality.

"So you've given your little friend the shake?" said Berkeley to Viola.

She made a wry face. "I couldn't bear him."

"Why, where's all the jewelry?"

Murdock noted that while Jessie was festooned with diamonds, and had fingers laden with diamonds, pearls, and rubies, Viola had no jewelry but an inexpensive diamond and pearl star at her throat. At Berkeley's question, Viola blushed angrily.

Jessie laughed. "That dog!" exclaimed she.

"You don't mean he took his presents back?" cried Berkeley, amused.

"Everything!" replied Viola. "He was one of those cheap skates that bring the jewels with 'em when they come and, when they go home, take 'em off, count 'em, and put 'em in the box and carry 'em away again." Her eyes flashed. "He used me as a show window. I never owned a single piece."

"Her flat was in his name," Jessie now broke in, appealing to Murdock's sympathy. "And all the furniture and the traps. When they quarreled, he even tried to take her clothes."

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"He did take that ermine wrap," said Viola.

Suddenly her brows grew stormy, her bosom heaved, and her even teeth small and sharp dug into her full carmine lower lip until the blood came. "There he is now!" exclaimed Jessie.

Murdock saw a heavy, flabby, middle-aged man, hairy except on the top of the head where he was bald, advancing with a girl full a foot taller than he. She was ablaze and adangle with jewelry. She had a magnificent figure, a small head, a sweet shy face, an abundance of genuinely golden hair. She walked awkwardly, and wore the beautiful clothing and the jewels as if she were not used to finery.

"Isn't she a lummix!" sneered Jessie.

Viola was blazing alternately at her former lover and at his new mistress. The girl saw her, blushed, stumbled, almost fell. The man, noting Viola, returned the furious glance with an insolent curl of his bloated lips. He looked almost dead from vicious indulgence, suggested something grown in a dark damp place, unwholesome, perhaps poisonous. Murdock shuddered at the thought of Viola's young loveliness in that embrace. At the man's sneer Viola half started from her chair.

"Don't be a fool, Vi," rebuked Jessie. "Don't forget you're a lady."

"I'd like to tear him up," cried Vi. "And I ought to strip those things off her! They belong to me. God knows I earned them, putting up with that——"

She flung out from between the white teeth and the fresh lips an epithet so coarse that Murdock winced. Berkeley laughed. "Don't forget you're a lady, Vi," he said mockingly. "Be careful what you say, or you'll make a bad impression on my friend."

But Viola was too infuriated for prudence, neces-

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sary though it was that she speedily find a successor to the departed lover. "I don't care a damn!" she hissed. "If he looks this way again, I'll break a carafe on that bloated, bald head of his."

"Come, come! Ladies! Ladies!" said Berkeley, good-humored but imperative—the master cracking the whip warningly at the performing animals.

"You keep out of this," retorted Viola, lowering at him.

Berkeley's eyes began to glitter; but before he could speak Jessie cried sharply: "Now, look here, Vi! You've got to behave like a lady. What did you promise me when I let you come along to-night?" She turned to Murdock. "I never saw such a girl! She's got the worst disposition in the world. Now, when I break with a——"

"You!" sneered Viola. "Why, you—" And she paused to laugh.

Jessie, cheeks aflame and eyes glowing: "Viola, if you try to queer me, you know what you'll get."

With the suddenness of those whose lives swing as freely to the winds of the passions as a weathervane to the winds of heaven, Viola became calm, was smiling and gracious, seemed the brighter, the more sparkling and glittering for the storm, like the roughened surface of the lake when the clouds break and the sun streams down again. At first Murdock thought Jessie's warning was the cause of the change, if indeed it had any cause beyond the whimsical veering of her wayward temper. Then he chanced to note a flashily dressed young man at the next table but one, and so seated among his male companions that he was full face to Viola. The young man was smirking at her; her large, brilliant eyes were shining softly on him. Presently she said to Jessie, with

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elaborate carelessness, "There's Billy — with the other boys—see?"

Jessie flung a withering glance at Billy and his friends. "That beer bunch!" she retorted contemptuously. "There isn't the price of a supper in the crowd." And Murdock, new to the "Broadway set" but judging it by the universal principles of human nature, knew it was for Billy's sake that Viola had quarreled with her protector. "Vi's a good thing, she is," continued Jessie to Murdock. "The idea of wasting time on race-track touts!"

Murdock was amused but not surprised to see, a moment later, another of the young men of "that beer bunch" take advantage of Berkeley's back to throw a kiss to Jessie under pretense of pulling at his cigarette; and a few seconds later Jessie, after a furtive glance that contrasted strangely with the mask of simple good-nature she habitually wore, returned the kiss with her eyes, her lips touching the edge of her wine glass. And now Murdock, sensitive to the realities beneath this alluring scene of free and careless gayety, noted how the eyes of all the men and women were constantly roving as if each were seeking some one more attractive than his or her partner, some one for whom to shake off the light bond and flit away. Berkeley, too, was looking about, though Jessie was trying to keep his attention upon her. Her tone was caressing, but mechanically so. It would have irritated Murdock; still, he envied Berkeley the coarse-fibered nerves that enabled him to enjoy it, just as the noisy uproar of the orchestra pleased his ears more than would real music.

"So you're in love with Billy," said Murdock to Viola, in an aside.

She gave him a quick, apprehensive look. Then,

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the instinct guiding her, she replied candidly: "Just at present. But I'll get tired of putting up for him soon."

"You 'put up' for him?"

"Of course. The men buy us; we buy lovers."

"Naturally," said Murdock. "That's your way of getting even."

"Getting even?" Evidently Viola did not understand him. "No," she went on to explain, "it's the life we lead. The men that buy us don't want love. They think they do, but they don't. They want to feel free to go at any minute. They just want—" her look and her laugh moved Murdock to pity for her, though she evidently felt only the cheerfullest, most cynical sarcasm—"what they pay for. Well, a woman's got to love somebody, and the only kind she can get, if she's our sort, is the Billys." She smiled charmingly. "Come to think of it, love isn't in it at all. The men despise us as things. We look round for something lower than ourselves, something we can buy and despise." Her pretty face sobered; her pouting lips, that looked as if a myriad of kisses had stung them to a fuller bloom and a deeper crimson, curled in a smile of cynical self-contempt.

"Cheer up, Vi!" cried Berkeley, lifting his glass.

Viola startled, shrugged her sinuous shoulders, laughed, emptied her glass.

When Berkeley, feeling that he had warded off the gloom, returned to Jessie, Murdock said, "You're not very prudent, are you?"

"Why?"

"Letting me into the secrets."

Viola tilted her charming head and smiled at him slantingly, her eyes half closed. "I don't have to be

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prudent—yet. I'm only twenty and I've got my looks. When I'm Jessie's age, I'll begin to be sly. Besides, it doesn't do any harm to let the men see the game. They don't care what we are or what we think. They despise us. All they want is our bodies."

Murdock winced again. Yet it was impossible for him to be deeply impressed by her coarseness or to retain the impression long; her figure was too stimulating, her face too sweet and girlish. Her bloom was as evanescently tainted by her coarseness as is the bloom of the rose by the ugly worm that crawls across its petals and disappears. Leaning close to her, as he now was, to make their conversation private, he learned why she was fascinating him, why looking at her made him burn with the memory of Juliet Raeburn. It was not altogether, not chiefly, the resemblance of figure and dress. It was her perfume—faint yet strong, sweet yet sharp, persistent, insistent, sensuous, the odor of fresh flowers, of violets, of lilies of the valley, of all that scents the springtime.

"What is that perfume?" he asked, striving in vain to make his tone careless.

Her eyes flashed gayly and she waved the ends of her feather boa under his nose. He paled and flushed and paled again. She laughed, a little jealously. "It reminds you of somebody?" she teased. And again she tilted her small head and gazed at him with that slanting, daring glance, the more naked that it was half veiled by her drooping eyelids.

His eyes blazed upon her the passion that had been cheated of its prey. "You'll do," he said, delighting in his brutality.

Her gaze softened; she leaned toward him languorously. "I'm glad," she said softly. "You're my

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style. I don't believe you're *quite* as young as I've been thinking."

"Why?"

"You've been through a lot. I don't like young men."

"Billy is about twenty-three, I'd judge."

"Oh, that's different. Billy don't cut any ice with me, not really." And again she gave him the long, languorous look; there was insincerity in it, but also more sincerity than his lack of vanity permitted him to credit. That, however, concerned him little; what he wanted was to feel himself the master, the autocrat. And, with his senses stimulated and his sensibilities blunted by champagne, he was getting that feeling from her.

"It's dead slow here to-night," cut in Berkeley. "Let's go to Churchill's or Jack's."

"Not Jack's," cried Jessie. "Vi made a scene there yesterday morning." Whereat they both laughed, throwing back their heads and showing the bright, fresh interiors of their pretty mouths.

They were having their third quart of the champagne. Viola was making opportunities to lean against Murdock, to touch him, to insinuate her fingers into his palm. Jessie, forgetting wisdom, was casting languishing glances indiscriminately round the room, as she lavished upon Berkeley the stereotyped words and gestures of endearment. "Waiter, the bill!" called Berkeley, ignoring her.

"Oh, no, let's stay here," protested she, darting a fiery glance at her young man at "Billy's" table.

"No, we're going," said Berkeley, smiling. "And"—with a tantalizing laugh—"if that young man of yours, the one you've been flirting with, follows us he'll take you home, my dear."

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Jessie shrank and bit her lip; Viola laughed. Jessie scowled furiously at her; but with Jessie prudence was a primal instinct, and her mask swiftly and automatically readjusted. "What young man?" asked she with an injured air.

"The one that slips out when I come, and slips in when I go," replied Berkeley unruffled. "The one in the 'beer bunch' over there."

In paying, he exhibited a great package of bills laid flat between the folds of a leather case. The eyes of the two girls glistened as their imaginations were stimulated by the sight of the purchase price of so much luxury. "How they hate him for having so much of what they so desperately want," thought Murdock. He liked Viola better as he noted that her look of envy was merely human, while Jessie's was the look that goes with poised beak and twitching talon. Besides, he had drunk an unusual quantity of champagne. When Viola pressed his arm he returned the pressure, closed his eyes, inhaled the perfume that shook from the big black plumes in her white hat. "Juliet!" he muttered, the fumes of wine and of perfume combining to intoxicate him. And his fingers closed upon Viola's slender arm so violently that she cried out with pain. "But I don't mind," she hastened to add languorously. "I—like it."

As the blast of outer air douched him he recovered somewhat. "What the hell am I about?" he muttered. Then, aloud, in a curt, abrupt tone, "I must go to the hotel."

"Look at him," said Jessie to Vi aside. "I didn't think he could be so fierce."

"I don't like him," whispered Vi. "But—" She made a pouting face.

"He's easy fruit," replied Jessie, "if you manage

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him right. And, you're lying. You do like him. Don't make a fool of yourself and get soft on him."

Berkeley was remonstrating with him. "No, you ain't going home," cried he. "You wouldn't leave me in the lurch. Besides, the fun's just beginning."

But Murdock's jaw was set. "Here's where I drop out."

"Put me in a hansom," said Viola. "I've got enough. I'm going home, too."

Jessie winked at Berkeley and tugged at his arm. Berkeley grinned. "Oh! . . . All right, old man. Put her in a hansom."

"Yes, put her in a hansom," said Jessie. "You can drop her at my flat. She's staying with me."

Berkeley and Jessie drove away in the brougham. The carriage opener ordered up a hansom. Murdock held from the wheel the skirts of Viola's fur-trimmed, white-cloth wrap. As she stepped up she flirted into his very face the mass of flounces and laces she was holding. The motion freed a cloud of perfume—the perfume. He straightened up, hesitated. As she sat in the corner of the cab, her sweet, pathetic young face pleading to him, she looked even lovelier than she was. The wind-swept street was icy; he felt chilled to the heart with loneliness. "Hurry," she said. "Let's get the glass down."

He entered the hansom, the glass dropped, and they were off. "I'm so cold," she murmured, snuggling her bare hand into his. "Please fasten my wrap at the throat."

To do this he had to bend very close to her. She tilted back her head and pouted her enticing lips conveniently near his, in frank invitation. He seemed not to see, completed his task, drew away.

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"Aren't you going to kiss me?" she pouted and pleaded.

"I'll not rob Billy."

"Bother Billy! You're in love with some woman!"

"Well?"

"Shut your eyes and imagine I'm her."

"Is that the way you do?"

"Often."

She put her head on his shoulder; he closed his eyes; the perfume and her soft, round cheek against his gave him an illusion that set him afire.

At the flathouse in Fifty-ninth Street, he helped her to descend, accompanied her up the steps, stood while the night porter was shuffling and yawning down the hall in answer to her impatient ring. "Good night," he said.

"Come in a minute and get warm," urged she. "You surely want to see what kind of a place old Berkeley has put Jessie in."

"I don't want to keep the cabby standing in the cold."

"He'll stand all night for somebody. It might as well be you."

Murdock, cold, with his passion burning at his heart, with the loneliness of his hotel drearily visioned, entered. Jessie's flat was on the second floor. Viola gave the porter a two-dollar bill as they left the elevator. "We have to keep him in a good humor," she explained. "This is a quiet house. Everything goes in New York, if you pay well."

The flat lost all suggestion of mere apartment the instant one was inside the doors, and took on the appearance of a large and luxurious house. Before Murdock, a grand stairway led upward to the second floor of the

duplex. To the left was a salon with two onyx pillars supporting the carved ceiling. "This furniture—and the pictures—belong to Jessie," said Viola. Murdock glanced round perfunctorily. Everything was costly and ostentatious; but, like all the surroundings of the luxurious class, both respectable and otherwise, there was small evidence of individuality or taste, unless a craving for the showiest and costliest be called individuality and taste.

The atmosphere of the room was drenched with the powerful essence Jessie used. Viola had dropped her wrap on a divan. She was removing her hat pins, her arms above her head. Murdock's eyes rested on her. Suddenly he seized her and crushed her in his arms. She gave a cry of pain; he held her the more tightly, for the cry seemed somehow to assuage the flames that were licking his heart. "Don't!" she panted. "You're mussing my only best dress. Almost everything I had was taken by that—" Again she used the epithet that struck him in the face like a dab of filth.

He shuddered, shook her violently. "For God's sake!" he cried, angry as a rudely roused dreamer, "can't you use decent language?"

"What would *you* call a man that had treated you as he treated me?" she asked, unmoved. And her limpid languorous eyes were upon him, and her sensuous, yet girlish lips and her warm, sweet breath were alluring him.

He laughed. The worm had dropped from the rose, had vanished. "Forget him," said he. "And help me to forget—everything unpleasant."

"I'll send away the hansom. You can ring for another when you want it."

He gave her a ten-dollar bill. "Tell him to keep it."

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She left the room. By way of four or five mutually reflecting mirrors he saw her in the adjoining room at a desk. She took out a pocketbook, put his ten-dollar bill in one of the compartments, took another bill and some silver from another compartment. She rang. A colored maid, very neat in cap and apron and black dress, appeared. "Tell the porter to give this to the cabman waiting outside," he heard her say. "And bring some champagne—a quart."

But her petty swindle did not disgust him; it moved him to pity. And in a moment he had forgotten it, was reclining on the great sofa, was defying the image of Juliet Raeburn. "No woman shall rule me," he muttered. "Soon I shall be master of myself again." When she returned she was in a loose gown of thin silk that wrapped round her legs at every step and revealed her slender neck and all of her slender back. Her form was flaunting more ostentatiously than ever the suggestion of impatience at the restraint of its garments. She flung herself into his arms with a little gasp.

"When will Jessie and Berkeley come?" he asked.

"Oh, about daybreak. But he'll go straight away to his family. You say you're not married?"

"I didn't say," he replied curtly.

"How touchy you are!" She slid her arms slowly and softly over his neck and face.

"That's a wonderful perfume you use."

"I love it."

"What is—the name?"

"That's my secret. I used to be a model in a dress-making place, and the lady that kept it——"

He drew her round into his lap and held a glass of champagne to her lips. "Never mind your past," said he. "Let's forget."

VIOLA

She kissed him—on the eyes, on the lips. “I like you,” she murmured. “Really—not make believe.”

He shut his eyes and, with the fumes of the champagne dizzying him and her perfume deluding him, he kissed Juliet Raeburn until Viola pushed him from her. “You frighten me,” she gasped. “I wouldn’t think you could be so cruel.”

“You don’t know me,” replied he with a grim, curt laugh. “I’m only beginning to get acquainted with myself.”

“Gad, what a relief that kind of women are,” said Berkeley when he met Murdock at lunch next day. “No need to put on! No need to waste time in polite preliminaries. A man can just unbuckle and turn himself loose. You look like a new person, Charles.”

“I am,” said Murdock, with a gleam of self-derision.

IX

THE WEDDING, AND AFTER

BERKELEY had sent "her" home by a different route and by the humble conveyance of the Pullman drawing-room. To make his quaint domestic accounts balance, he was bringing her from New York a gold and platinum bag set and fringed with rubies. As these entries to Florence's credit were frequently necessary, and as he begrudged every dollar for purposes other than personal, his admiration for himself as a model husband was rapidly swelling.

"I'll have the car ready day after to-morrow night," said he to Murdock, when they were about to separate at the Saint X station.

Murdock looked blank, then inquiring.

"You know, we told them we'd be back Thursday."

"Did we? So we did."

"You're not going to disappoint me, are you?"

"If I can arrange it," was Murdock's unsatisfactory reply.

"Tired of little Hastings? Or don't you fancy her? She is thin. Perhaps you'd prefer Jessie."

Murdock's expression was so peculiar that Berkeley reddened. But he stood his ground. "What's the use of these hypocrisies?" said he. "Of course, with the ladies— But, among ourselves——"

With a hasty "I'll see," Murdock sprang into his

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waiting auto. Berkeley looked after him quizzically. "Conscience troubling him, I guess," reflected he. "Queer thing, a man's conscience—or a woman's, for that matter."

But Berkeley had guessed wrong. Unlike him, Murdock did not keep accounts with conscience, but with self-respect; and it did not occur to him that in the Viola incident, all but forgotten before the Saint X express had cleared the suburbs of New York, he was in the least involved. He had found Viola neither agreeable nor distasteful, simply unimportant. She had been accidental—a fortunate accident, he thought, because when he met her his madness for Juliet Raeburn was threatening not only to destroy him but also to defeat itself through its reckless violence. Viola had halted him long enough to enable him to recall reason to its place as the chief and trusty servant of his will. A horse will go farther and faster under the rein than as a runaway—and so will a passion. But in herself, Viola had been to him merely a matter of a mood and a perfume. His notion that she might free him from Juliet Raeburn had passed with the turbulent, champagne-hazed hours that gave it birth. He could not, like a Berkeley, satisfy his imperial longings for life by any such tame and colorless impressions as he could get from a woman who had only the commonplace tricks and arts of appeal to the senses, who was merely good-natured, obliging, and pretty. To his strength of imagination and of passion, her prettiness as a source of sensation lost its power with the falling of the veil from the empty, bare, inner temple of her personality. If he had wanted a mannikin for the display of fine raiment and jewelry, or the mere sense of convenient femininity that is most men's chief satisfaction from the women they attach and maintain within or

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without the bond, Viola would have done as well as another; better than most because she was tactful enough not to irritate with untimely chatter. But the man who craves the ocean cannot stay himself long with placid paddling about in a bathing pool. As for what Viola might feel at his abrupt and final exit, it was not his habit to consider others where consideration might make him hesitate. The master men, playing life as a game and using their fellow-men as pawns, would not get far if they included consequences to others in their calculations. Also, he had learned that consideration usually causes greater blunders and disasters than ruthlessness; finally, he had not the necessary vanity to imagine her interest in him other than purely commercial. He rightly interpreted her constraint with him, so different from her and Jessie's familiarity with Berkeley. She was not at heart vulgar; the reverse. But she liked to be surrounded by vulgarity; it gave her a pleasant sense of moral superiority, while the absence of it seemed a criticism of her mode of life which she, still true to her early training in a New England Presbyterian family, regarded as degraded.

Thus, Murdock made his plans with not a suggestion of that vanity so agreeably disguised as tenderheartedness which dominates most men in their dealings with women who care no more for them than they themselves care for the women. "Berkeley can settle it," said he to himself, halfway to the Eyrie. And when he had decided on the size of the consolation check Viola vanished, having once more and for the last time served to evoke the flaming phantom of Juliet Raeburn. He set his teeth together.

"As soon as Norma's wedding is over——"

His passion wrapped him in the torment of its flames.

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He could not banish the vision of Juliet's slim, cool, white beauty with its mystery of magic and terror. And a hot wind heavy with her perfume released her long, thick hair and drenched his face with its electric waves. The measure of an individuality is the sweep of its imagination and the intensity of its desires. The pale personalities that flicker and fade in the background of this world do not understand, can scarcely credit, the passions of the few strong men—passions that compel them to labors without ceasing, to sacrifices without limit, to cruelties and crimes colossal.

“As soon as Norma's wedding is over——”

In the excitement and confusion of the preparations for the wedding his coming was hardly noticed. Sophy, eager for grievances to enter in her ledger account with him, frowned at sight of his train of secretaries with bags and bundles; and, when he kept himself shut in his library with his tools for concentrating the whole world at his desk, she told herself that he was outraging the proprieties. “He can't take time from his business for his family even when his only daughter is getting married,” thought she. If he had not kept out of the way her grievance would have been that he had not stayed in New York and minded his own affairs.

Norma had wanted a quiet wedding; but Sophy would not permit it. To her old-fashioned prejudices there was something not quite moral in a private wedding. It was bad enough that Norma should be marrying a man older than her mother; to marry him quietly, furtively, as it were, was not to be tolerated. Norma yielded to stop her mother's sighing and complaining. The result was an upheaval in the domestic arrangements and in the routine of life that carried the girl

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is sitting up." And this went the rounds as proof conclusive of his granitelike heart.

In his irritation he began to dabble in speculation, stirred up a financial war that forced him to hasten East, involved himself so deeply that it was six weeks before he could leave New York. He paused at Slumber Land to take up Norma and Joe—Joe reluctant to end the honeymoon and release his matchless bride to the raking eyes and thoughts of men who still were as he had been Norma, glad to get away from the mosquitoes and from Joe's incessant sounding of the one note from the harp with the one string.

In honor of the returning bride, Sophy made a special effort and met them at the Saint X station, arriving just in time, as the train was twenty minutes late. She had gained considerably in weight; but her skin was clear, and Katy, unusually dextrous that day, had done her hair so that its recession behind her ears and its thinness at the temples were well concealed. Also, she happened to have selected a becoming hat and dress, that gave a fair chance to her limpid, soft, deeply blue eyes and her faultless nose. Usually, she affected frills and furbelows and rich trimmings, all taking from her height and adding to her girth; to-day she was wearing a white linen, plain, roomy, and a new style of corset that greatly reduced her in front. Her sleepy inertia was swept away by Norma's enthusiasm of young delight at being home again. The bride was, naturally, the center of interest, and not until Murdock and his wife were alone in the rear seat of an auto, and on the way to the Eyrie did they realize what utter strangers they had become. All those years of intimacy seemed to each like a faint memory of a former life.

As the auto swung into the grounds, Murdock's face

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became cold and frowning. When he left, these grounds had been a model of order and beauty. Now, hedges and lawns were ragged, fallen leaves were strewn messily about, flower beds were unsightly with faded and dead blooms and littered petals; the caterpillars were ravaging the trees.

"Jansen sick?" asked Murdock. Jansen was the head gardener.

"No," replied Sophy, almost as if addressing an acquaintance. "He came up for orders as usual this morning. But I was so busy getting ready to come to the station that I couldn't see him. . . . He's been doing very well this summer. Everybody speaks of how beautiful the grounds are."

Murdock said nothing. A faint, sarcastic smile flitted across his features. Evidently "everybody" had been at "everybody's" familiar trick of encouraging rack and ruin with flattery.

Now they were in front of the house; out hurried the butler and second man, both in unkempt livery, with linen none too clean and unshaven cheeks. Murdock glanced from one to the other; they looked uneasy, for they knew at once the why of that keen scrutiny, though they had not had the necessary imagination to prepare for it. He ascended to the entrance; chairs and cushions untidily about the verandas, the floors neglected. He muttered under his breath and entered the house. There the same glaring evidences of neglect—dust thick on the big table in the hall, which was ironically decorated with a forgotten dusting rag. A broom upon the floor in full view of the entrance. One of the statues awry upon its pedestal; the pictures crooked, one of them at an absurd angle.

"Your rooms are ready," said his wife. "At least,

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I told the servants to get them ready. I haven't able to find a housekeeper yet."

"Simcox will look after me," replied he at "What time do you have lunch?"

"At one o'clock."

They were hesitating, he at the library door, at the elevator. "Then I'll see you at lunch," said he wardly. And they went their separate ways, each to be freed of the embarrassment and strain of other's presence.

Norma and Joe came at one, and just as lunch announced Charles Junior appeared, brilliant in g flannels and very red from a sail on the river. He se to Murdock full a year older than two months be certainly he had passed out of the clumsy age in graceful and manly youth. The lunch was in fi dinner, and a bad one. The service was almost slo a retrogression to what it had been before they n into the Eyrie with Norma in charge of the house One rich dish succeeded another—turtle soup, frie with thick sauce, roast birds saturated with butter, with mayonnaise dressing, the ice cream with whi cream and chocolate sauce. Only Sophy and the ate. Murdock and Joe, both at the age when a ma to begin to be careful about his diet if he is not to his waist and become bald, wrinkled, and baggy, c not adventure anything that was served. Norma in the same plight, being mindful of her comple which had not benefited by the hardship of the c and being also ever haunted by the fear of her inhe tendency to fat. As all three were hungry, the inal to eat made them grumpy and irritable, roused the ical faculty in Norma and her father. But nothing said; to speak would have been to quarrel.

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After lunch all went to the broad, well-shaded east veranda, Mrs. Murdock persistently falling asleep, startling from her cat naps and looking about with an expression of alertness and interest that would have struck them as ludicrous had they been less out of humor. "I'm afraid mother isn't well," said Norma in an undertone to her brother, when Sophy was nodding.

"Oh, she's all right," replied Charley. "Aren't you, ma?"

Sophy awakened with a start. "Yes, I think it is going to rain," said she, the weather having been the subject of conversation when she dozed off.

Charley laughed; the others smiled, Sophy joining in that no one might suspect her having been asleep. "I said you were well," explained Charley.

"Yes, I'm feeling quite well," said Sophy, "quite well—for me."

But her face in repose told a different story. It is in the hour after the meal that the penalties of unchecked indulgence of natural uneducated appetite show most tellingly in the face. Sophy looked worn, and her color was that of a person suffering from some inward convulsion. "She always sleeps a while after lunch," continued her son, when she went off again. "And after dinner she goes straight to bed. Oh, she's all right. She eats and sleeps fine—though she imagines she doesn't."

Murdock was studying his wife's unguarded countenance with an expression that made a chill creep over Norma, the only one to observe it. "He realizes the truth about her," thought she. And then she visibly startled, for it was the first time in her life that she had frankly admitted to herself that there was a "truth" about her mother. Joe and Charley sauntered away across the lawn. She presently said softly to her father:

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"Poor mother! I don't believe there's another woman in Saint X who has always stayed so close at home. She has given her whole life to her family."

Murdock reluctantly took his strange eyes from his wife, slowly to concentrate them on his daughter. He did not speak for full half a minute, during which Norma felt her blood contracting about her heart under the spell of that mysterious and even terrible glance. At last he said, and it astonished her that his voice was as usual, "When do you want possession of this house?"

"Not at all," replied she. "You and mother and Charley are going to live on here." She smiled. "Of course you've got to pay me rent."

"I bought the house on the distinct understanding that you were to live in it."

"But mother has been writing me how much she liked it—that she had completely changed her mind."

"I am going to talk with her about it to-day or to-morrow."

Something—perhaps it was in his tone, perhaps it was only the forewarnings of her own instinct—made Norma say with an entreaty that was piteous: "Please don't talk of it, or of anything disturbing—until she is better. Or, let me speak to her about it."

Murdock made no reply. Presently his wife awakened. "Have I been asleep?" said she.

"You have," replied Norma.

"I oughtn't to have done it. Now, I've got one of my headaches. Sleeping in the daytime is always bad. But lately I get so little rest at night. I sleep soundly a couple of hours or so, and then I wake up, and stay awake till nearly daylight. I suppose at my time of life people begin not to need so much sleep."

Norma, of a generation somewhat better informed

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on the subject of digestion, could have told her the cause of this stupor followed by hours of insomnia. But of what use? Her mother would simply have been irritated. Ignorance of all kinds resents light; ignorance that shields self-indulgence repulses light.

"Charley says I worry too much about the house," continued Sophy. "But that's my way. I can't change. I can't be like the women who are always either entertaining or being entertained."

Murdock rose and strolled into the house. Sophy looked after him with a furtive expression of dislike that astounded and shocked her daughter. To change the subject Norma said: "Joe and I have decided to stay on at the Degarmo house. We'll keep it just as it is, all closed but the south wing. Don't forget, you and father and Charley are dining with us to-morrow night."

"I'm afraid I sha'n't feel well enough."

"Trash!" said Norma. "I'm coming in the morning to take you for a walk."

Sophy was instantly angry and showed it. "You know I can't walk!" she cried. "If it wasn't for the driving, I'd not be able to leave the house."

"If it wasn't for driving, you'd be well and strong," retorted Norma. She was thinking of her father's eyes as he left. "I'll be up about nine o'clock."

She whistled from the edge of the porch; Joe turned, and following the suggestion of her pointed finger, struck out for a point near the first downward bend of the hill drive, she cutting across the lawn to meet him there. "I thought you'd as lief walk home," said she. "I *must* do my five miles."

X

"MARRIAGE IS SACRED TO ME"

SOPHY, breakfasting alone in her sitting room, with the door into the hall open, glanced up to see Murdock in the doorway. "Gracious!" she gasped, much as if he had been an intruder from the highroad. And the tone and manner of his "Good morning" carried the same suggestion.

He seated himself near the window and gazed out across the balcony into the treetops sparkling in the September sunshine. She resumed her breakfast. It was on a huge silver tray laid with fine linen—the three great silver pieces of the coffee set, a plate of hot biscuits, three eggs, and two chops. She had finished eggs and chops and all but two of the biscuits, and was drinking her coffee and hot cream from an English porcelain cup the size of a not small bowl. She was dressed, as was her early morning custom, in a mussy-fussy negligee over a torn silk petticoat and an old corset cover. Her long, Indian-straight hair had been carelessly rolled into a knot on top of her head. In her childhood she was taught those small economies that are a temptation to degenerate into the slattern—was taught to be careful of "Sunday clothes," to be ever mindful that frequent washing is harder on garments than use, to wear out the *old clothes* round the house, when "nobody" would see

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—"nobody" being those whose good opinion is, or should be, worth more to one than that of all the world beside. Though she had no stinginess anywhere in her, and had eagerly adopted the effortless luxuries penetrating to all parts of America with the growth of a rich class and a class of ingenious and assiduous purveyors to the rich, she held on to those thrifty habits of her childhood. They were always peering, now shrewdly, now amusingly, and again absurdly, through her veneer of extravagance, as her early dialect asserted itself in the more formal speech she had later learned to use. She was certainly not an inviting young matron as she sat there in those ill-assorted and unbecoming garments, her face somewhat swollen from the night's sleep. But he had seen that same spectacle—and worse—too many times especially to note it, though its contrast with his neatness and good taste would have made a painful or a cynical impression upon an onlooker. She was out of harmony with the room, too; for, although she had taken no care of it, had let upholstery and silk wall-covering get frayed and stained, her occupancy had been too brief to destroy altogether the simple but luxurious freshness. More than her appearance he was noting the dowdiness of her room; and a nick in the edge of her cup was giving him the feeling of stroking velvet against the grain. Nicked dishes happened to be his especial small aversion; nor had years of daily home experience blunted his senses to them.

"Are you going away again?" she asked, trying to account for the strangeness of his coming to that apartment where he had never been before.

"Yes," replied he. And now his eyes were resting directly upon her. "I'm going to New York to-night. I want to settle our affairs on a sensible basis." He

was speaking slowly, choosing his words. "We ought not let them drift any longer."

To an outsider there would have been profound pathos in the relations of these two—the start in all the glamour of passion and romance, the pitiful anticlimax in this mutual repulsion, scarcely concealed, this drearily ugly commonplace of alienation. But there was no pathos in it for Murdock or for Sophy; these day by day, hour to hour, driftings apart make the heart callous and the imagination sterile.

"We must settle our affairs on a rational basis," he repeated, as his first statement seemed to have made no impression.

She looked at him. In all their married life he had never discussed money matters with her; she had spent what she pleased, had had her own balance at the bank, and he had always kept it up beyond her demand upon it. "Has Charley been spending too much!" she asked. "Anyhow, I don't know anything about that. He never comes to me for money."

"I mean *our* affairs—yours and mine."

She shook her head vaguely. "Anything you like. I always have been used to sacrifices, all my life. I guess I can make out, no matter what happens. Have you lost some money?"

"No," said he, with some irritation—not at her inability to see what he was trying to get at, but because he suddenly and exasperatingly felt ashamed, felt that he was a coward, using his superior intelligence and power to compel a fellow being, who was generous and kind of heart, was simply weak and foolish in a different way from himself. "No," he repeated. "On the contrary, everything seems to be going well."

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"It'd be a pity," said she reflectively, "if we had to spend our declining years in poverty. I've always said, I'd rather never have anything, than lose it."

At "declining years" he made an impatient gesture, and rose—the first outward signs of the tempest within. He abruptly seated himself opposite her at the table. "Sophy," said he, "there's only one sensible course for us, and that is for each of us to go his own way."

"Oh!" A yellowish pallor overspread her face. She wiped her mouth with the napkin, laid it down again, steadied her trembling hand on the edge of the tray. He lowered his eyes. To hold his purpose from wavering required all that hardness of fibre which enables the leaders of men to judge and to resolve and to push on, where the ordinary mortal weakens. Murdock had bared the knife to attack the cancer he thought was destroying both their lives; her shrinking made him suffer, but not flinch.

"For a long time," he went on, "I've seen that you feel constrained when I come, and relieved when I go. Isn't it true?"

"And whose fault is it?" she demanded.

"Nobody's fault," replied he. "It's simply a condition. I speak of it only because it's as much to your interest as to mine that we meet the condition like sensible people."

A dark-red flush came into her yellow cheeks. She pushed back her chair, shook her hair into even greater oily dishevelment. "So!" she cried. "You want to go away to that Raeburn woman!"

He rose, closed the door, seated himself again—all deliberately and quietly.

"You'd *better* close the door!" she sneered.

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"I thought so," he said tranquilly. He leaned across the table. Into his eyes came the relentless look that made people afraid of him; the feeling that caused that look made him often afraid of himself. "I am going to be candid with you, Sophy," said he in a low, even voice. "And you are going to be candid with me. I am not going to tell you any lies or make any false pretenses. You are not going to tell me lies or make false pretenses."

Her eyes had lowered before his look. She now sank back in her chair and took on a sullen, cowed expression.

"We'll keep to the point," he continued. "That point is you and I—our relations, present and future. I don't want to hear anything about the sacrifices you've made. I don't want any silly talk about the children, or my duty to them. Norma's married; Charley is practically grown. Nor will it be of any use for you to beg the question by bringing in any other woman. The point isn't what we think of other people, or what other people think of us. It's what we—you and I—think of each other."

She understood; she felt the foundation of her earth shaking. "I haven't lost all my religion, if you have," said she. It was pathetic to see her mind running this way and that, like a trembling rabbit cornered by a dog. The spectacle of folly provoking fate, drawing down upon itself easily avoidable calamities, is exasperating, rouses no sympathy. But once the blow falls, the spectacle takes on the tragic dignity that always must invest woe; the causes are forgotten, and all but the misery itself. "I still believe in a God, and a hereafter," quavered she. "Marriage is sacred to me."

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"Now, Sophy," he replied, "you know that doesn't mean anything. We were both brought up in the old-fashioned American way. We were taught that love is the basis of marriage, and that when love goes, it is a degradation for two people to live on together."

"That ain't what my religion teaches me now."

"It's what your instinct teaches still—the instinct of every decent human being. . . . Tell me, Sophy, isn't it true that you've ceased to care for me, as a husband?"

"I'm past the age for such foolishness," retorted she. "And you ought to be, too—you the father of grown children, one of them married. That woman is making a fool of you, leading you on to dress and act as young as your son. And what does she want? Nothing but your money. You ought to have sense enough to know that no woman would look at a man of your age, except for his money."

"Then we can arrange our affairs very easily," said he, apparently unruffled, though he was white with the tension of hiding the deep wound of her stab into his vanity. "As you practically admitted a while ago, my only place in this household is payer of bills. Except for that and what you think people would think, you'd be glad if I took myself off for good."

She felt that he was entirely in the wrong, but had through his superior mental adroitness drawn her into a position where she seemed the one in the wrong.

"What I propose is this," he went on. "You will take half of all we've got, and you and I will release each other. Thus, we will cease to be each a drag on the other."

A long pause. Then she started up hysterically, her eyes wild, her body shaking. "Charles Murdock!"

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she cried shrilly. "O God! Is this man the father of my children, the man who used up my youth? When I think of all I suffered, having Norma and Charley—and my sickness, too, since— And now he wants to cast me off! and take up with another woman. Oh! Oh! Oh!" She dropped into a chair, buried her face in her hands and sobbed and moaned. "*This* is my reward! O my God, what can I have done that Thou shouldst punish me so?"

For five dragging minutes the silence was broken only by the sounds of her grief. He sat passive as a statue, and it would have been impossible to tell what was going on in his mind. When her weeping subsided into occasional sighs he said in his usual even voice, "Now, Sophy, let us resume common sense."

Down dropped her hands, out flashed her angry face. "You have no heart!" she cried. "You are as devoid of feeling as a fiend. You sit there and gloat over the sufferings of your sick wife."

"Why do you object to releasing me?"

"Ain't you my husband—*my* husband? Do you think a decent, self-respecting woman would give up her husband, the father of her children, to another woman! Do you think she'd allow the whole world to point at her as a cast-off wife?"

"For years you have *willingly* not been my wife." Her eyes shifted at those slow words, heavy freighted with meaning to both. "The only thing that troubles you, then," he went on, "is what people will say."

"Ain't that enough? Don't you care, haven't you self-respect enough to care what people say about your wife, the mother of your children?"

"I have not," replied he. "I let people say what they please. I do what I wish, and presently they tire

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of railing against me, and say—and think—what I wish them to. That's the way those who amount to anything conduct their lives. With all the money you could possibly spend, you'll find people will be extremely careful what they say about you. Besides, it isn't true that I wish to cast you off. It was you who cast me off. You ceased to care years ago." His steady glance confused and downfaced her. "I remember the very time, Sophy—the very night—though I didn't understand what it meant then, and probably you didn't."

A long, strained silence. "I never felt at ease with you, after I came to know you," she said hesitatingly, humility and apology in her voice. "And I didn't want to have any more children."

"The honest truth is we weren't suited to each other, and you realized it—fully realized it—a little sooner than I did. Isn't that so?"

"But I didn't go hunting after some other man," retorted she sullenly.

"How do you know what you'd have done if it had so chanced that the temptation came your way?"

"I suppose you think I couldn't have found anybody. Why, to go no farther, there was Tom Berkeley. Yes, your partner— Oh, I didn't tell everything—I've got enough sense for that. But I did my duty. I was a faithful wife and a devoted mother. And everybody knows it but you."

"If it were not for what other people would say, would you——"

"I won't give up my husband to no woman, no-how!" interrupted she. "I ain't so far lost to decency and religion."

"You mean that, while you yourself are free and

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purpose to remain free, and to do as you please, as you've always done, you refuse to free me."

"I won't give up my husband to any woman," she repeated. "I've got the fear of God in my heart."

He leaned back and reflected. She, watching him stealthily, had begun to feel the glow of victory, when he resumed in the same even, inflexible, gentle way: "I am not your husband, any more than you are my wife. You know it. No one else will ever know just how matters have stood between us two. But I know, and you know, that you are showing now the same selfishness, the same indifference to the feelings of everyone else, that you've always shown." As she opened her lips to make angry excuse and denial, he smiled and shook his head. "Oh, I know you, Sophy—at least, I *knew* you. And I can tell by your expression that this is one of the moments in which you are forced to see the real truth about yourself. You're one of those women who get the reputation for being domestic characters because they are lazy and indifferent, of being self-sacrificing because they're always talking about their self-sacrifice, with the world full of asses who take in whatever drops into their long ears and do no thinking."

"Talk on, talk on," cried she, tauntingly. "But I'll not give up my husband to another woman. And, let me tell you, Charles Murdock—" Her voice shrilled and her eyes sparkled with the hate of jealousy without love—"you want to look out how you goad me on. If I'm driven to it, I'll disgrace you and her together. *I'll name her!*"

But she got no satisfaction from his face. His voice did not betray him as he replied, "It's a matter of indifference to me what you do. I am determined

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to be free in form as well as in fact. Keep that clearly in mind."

"Oh, I'll ask for just separation papers."

"I repeat, I am determined to be free. Do you suppose I haven't planned it all?"

She had only a vague idea of that terrible will of his, because never before had any serious issue arisen between them. But it would have been impossible for even an unobservant and self-centered person to be his nearest neighbor so many years without getting some impression of the force within him—the force that gave power to his face where most men, as they leave behind boyhood's smooth expressionlessness, have weaker and weaker faces, redeemed only by that sadness which is the universal forecasting of the tragedy of the ever nearer end. At those words of his she shivered. But she said defiantly, "I guess the courts'll protect my rights and my children's against that low woman and you."

He rose, showed he was about to leave. "If you deal justly by me," he said, "you shall have half of what I've got. If you try to keep me from my rights, you will get nothing at all. I have put my property out of reach. As I told you, I am going to New York to-night." He was on the threshold. "I give you two weeks in which to decide." He was gone.

If she had been in the habit of observing the processes of her own mind, she would have been astonished at the thoughts that at once pushed in there and made themselves at home. Her dislike of him had been gaining steadily. To be rid of the constraint of his presence, rid of the disturbance his coming always raised within her, and to have a fortune as her very own—

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She began to cast about as to how she could conform her protestations and her principles to acceptance.

It was not her principles that drove out these thoughts, but a sudden return of jealousy. "Let that woman have him?" cried she. "Never! I'd *die* first. . . . God would never forgive me for such a sin." That was it; God would not permit her to go into partnership with adultery. "For the sake of his soul, I must make him give her up. Yes, I'll make him give her up. I'll show him whether a wife has rights or not. Riches swell men with pride and power, and they forget God and their duty."

There she remembered how she had been brought up, how just was his reminder that they were taught that divorce was as sacred as marriage, was a bulwark of morality, of the home—the real home that did not rest upon mere sexual fidelity but upon the deeper fidelity to the spirit of marriage. She thrust back these ideas, helpful though they were to her longing to be free and rich and comfortable. "I've learned better," she told herself. "It's only among the trashy and the sinful that divorce is tolerated." And yielding to the low-spirited mood which always closed in soon after a meal, she fell to picturing herself the lonely, discarded wife and mother, victim of a heartless husband who was treating her like a rifled honeycomb. She burst into tears and rang the bell for Katy.

"Send Charley to me," she sobbed.

XI

MOTHER AND SON

CHARLEY had to be roused from a sound sleep. He was at a dance the night before, had not got home until five. At his mother's summons, delivered hysterically by Katy, he thrust his feet into bath slippers, swathed himself in a blue silk robe, and hurried along the hall to her sitting room. "What is it, mother?" he cried. She made no answer, but continued to sob heartbrokenly.

"Shall I send for the doctor?" He glanced at the tray, still on the table before her. "You know you oughtn't to take cream in your coffee," he reproached. "The doctor warned us it makes blisters on the liver."

"Shut the door, Charley," she sobbed.

He obeyed.

"Your father—" she moaned. "O my God!"

"Father! Is he hurt?"

"O God! No—no! If it were merely that! Charley, your father wants to marry a low woman."

The boy started back in horror. "Mother!" he exclaimed. "Who handed you that pipe dream? It's false. Why, *father* wouldn't do such a rotten thing!"

"I knew my children would stand by me!"

"But it isn't true, mother. He's been lied about."

"He told me himself—in that very chair—not half an hour ago."

Charley stared stupidly at the vacant chair. "Im-

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possible!" he muttered. "Not father!" And he seated himself in it.

"Yes, your father. Go to him. Tell him what you think of him!"

"You didn't understand him, mother."

"O God!" wailed Sophy. "Is my boy against me? I tell you, Charley, he ordered me to divorce him, to free him so he could marry that Raeburn woman."

"Juliet Raeburn!" exclaimed the boy, leaping to his feet. "Mother, what *are* you talking about?"

"He came here and insulted me, his wife, your mother——"

Up boiled the boy's young blood, into his mind flashed a score of trifling incidents of that stay in the woods, incidents now saturated, rank, with sinister meaning. Without a word he darted out and down to the library. He did not pause to knock, but burst in. Murdock was at his table in the center of the room, writing. The long French windows were open and the light and air, sweeping round his strong figure, seemed to encircle it with an impassable barrier. Before his father glanced up, the boy was beginning to hang back.

"Well?" said Murdock, in his even, friendly yet reserved tone.

"Is it true, father?—what mother's been telling me?" stammered Charley.

"No doubt," replied Murdock, with no change of tone or expression. He kept his eyes on the boy, but dipped his pen in the ink and poised it above the paper.

The boy flushed, hesitated, half turned away. Then, catching fire again from his outraged mother, he forgot his awe and cried: "You sha'n't dishonor my mother and my sister!"

Just the hint of a flush came into Murdock's cheeks.

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His tone was even—but like the smooth surface of a white hot, molten lake—as he said: “You are making a fool of yourself. She is your mother, but I am your father. She and I are wife and husband—and no one will interfere in our affairs. Close the door after you.” And his pen resumed its rapid course along the sheet.

The boy could no more have disobeyed or have spoken again than if he, bound and gagged, were being carried from the room. In the hall outside, he wiped the streaming sweat from his face, dropped weakly on the lowest step of the front stairway. In at the open front doors came Norma, whistling and swinging her hat by its long ribbons. The morning was intoxicatingly fine, and her spirits were soaring and darting like a lark drenched and drunk with sunshine. “Hello, Charley boy,” she cried, kissing the top of his bent head and slapping him on the back. “Walking in your sleep? Mother up yet?”

Her brother drew her down beside him. Though there were no servants in sight, he whispered in her ear: “Mother and father are going to get a divorce.”

To his amazement, the news gave her no shock of surprise. “So it’s come at last!” she exclaimed, before she realized what she was saying.

Charley stared at her. “How did *you* find out?” he cried, after a prolonged stare at her.

But she had recovered herself; she now looked, and felt, as overwhelmed as he. Instinctively she, understanding feminine human nature, began to sympathize with her father, just as her brother, understanding masculine human nature better than feminine, took sides with his mother.

“Do you know about Juliet Raeburn, too?”

“Juliet Raeburn!” But even as Norma exclaimed,

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she understood. "O Charley!" she cried, "and I thought her a good woman!"

"So she is," maintained Charley. "He hasn't got her yet. I'll bet she doesn't dream of this."

"Perhaps not," conceded Norma, in confusion. She remembered that she had decided it was best not to tell Charley or their mother about the meeting and the discovery at Dangerfield's. "Why," thought she, amazed at the revelation of herself to herself, "I must have felt then that this was coming!"

"You must talk to father," Charley was saying. "He'll listen to you."

Norma slowly shook her head.

"Aren't you going to do anything?" demanded Charley. "I tell you, Norma, this thing must be stopped."

"But we mustn't say anything to either of them—directly." She hesitated, then went on: "Marriage has already taught me that nobody can judge between husband and wife. Nobody can know but just their two selves."

"It's all *his* fault," protested Charley, with almost hysterical energy. "At least, we know enough to know he's got no cause of any kind. Why, she's always at home, and she never spoke a really harsh word to him. The truth is, he has gotten the swollen head through being lucky in business, and has grown away from us."

"Don't say those things to mother, please," entreated Norma. "You'd only encourage her to make matters worse."

"But—the disgrace! The disgrace!"

"Nobody can disgrace you but yourself," was her tranquil reply.

Her brother eyed her disapprovingly. "Just like a

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woman! Women never do care anything about each other's sufferings. Not even your own mother's sorrow moves you."

"Perhaps I understand her better than you do," replied Norma absently.

"Well—anyhow, all I know is it's got to be stopped!"

"You go and get dressed," said his sister. "I'll see mother."

Mrs. Murdock had by this time somewhat composed herself. When she saw it was not Charley but Norma entering she refrained from bursting out afresh. Unless a woman is far more studied or far less sensible than was Sophy, she does not raise to another woman the suspiciously clamorous conventional appeals for sympathy. Norma went straight to her and kissed her. "Charley has told me," she said.

Charley had not noted his mother's dishevelment, but no detail of it escaped Norma; woman, looking at woman, is always scrutinizing. Besides Norma, whirled in so many respects to the opposite extreme from Sophy by the warning example of physical and mental slothfulness, was so particular about her person that she changed never less than twice a day throughout. As she kissed her mother, she held her breath that she might avoid at least the worst of the odor from the stale, musty, oily hair.

"If I hadn't been so devoted to my household, I'd have seen it coming," said Sophy. "All the men act that way nowadays." Her lip quivered. "It's the curse of riches. If we'd 'a' been poor, your father would have stayed on, a hard-working, steady family man, appreciating his home and his wife and children."

"A good many poor people act the same way," sug-

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gested Norma. "It seems to me, more poor people do it than rich. The rich are more conventional, more afraid of public opinion."

"So *you're* turning against me!" cried Sophy. "I might have known. The daughter always sides against the mother."

"Why, mother!" exclaimed Norma. "What did I say to make you think that?"

"Weren't you beginning to urge excuses for your father? Have you opened your lips for a single word against him?"

"I love him, mother, and I love you. I couldn't say anything against either of you."

"Not when he shows he's become a wicked man, and tries to cast your mother off!" And Sophy began to weep. "My daughter may turn against me, but no one else in all the world will. Everybody'll despise him and sympathize with me."

Norma, knowing the shallowness of feminine tears and having before her very eyes as well as in painful memory what seemed to her sufficient reasons why her mother did not charm, felt her heart going out to her father. She reproached herself, but she could not help it. "And, really, with such eyes and teeth and so much naturally lovely hair mother could be beautiful if she'd only brace up." Aloud she said gently: "You wrong me, mother. I'd never take sides against you. I'll take no side at all. I'll keep on loving you and father, and believing the best of both of you."

"You'd better be careful, miss!" cried Sophy. "If your father and I do part, I'll have half the property, and he'll have another woman. I can't believe he'll be fool enough to take her to church and give her the right to pick his pockets. Still, she'll likely get most of it."

MOTHER AND SON

You don't seem to know which side your bread's buttered on."

Norma's heart ached and she hung her head in shame. Presently she said timidly: "Would you mind, mother, if I went to see father? I'm not going to speak to him about this, unless he mentions it first. And if I do say anything, it'll be to try to bring him to you."

Sophy, with no more power to persist in anger than in any other exertion, seized gratefully upon this offer. "I know none of my children would act any way but honorable," said she. "They've been too well brought up." And now she wept again. "When I think how I carried and bore and watched over his children— O my God! *Why* hast Thou punished me?"

Norma knelt beside her mother. "Mother dear," she pleaded softly, "if father is—what you say, wouldn't you be better off without him? Wouldn't he be only a torment to you?"

"I've thought of that," conceded Sophy, trapped into candor. Then, remembering her pose and her principles, she pushed her daughter away and burst out again: "How *dare* you suggest such a thing, Norma Murdock! He's *my* husband! He's *mine*! And have you no sense of shame? Don't you care anything about scandal? You talk like those trash along the river front that are always getting into the divorce courts."

"I was only trying to imagine what I'd do in the same circumstances."

"You wait till Joe goes off after another woman; then we'll see what you'll do!"

"I'm sorry I said that," apologized Norma, not because she was in the least affected by a suggestion so preposterous, but to stay the storm.

"Oh, that woman, that woman!" Sophy was pa-

cing the floor, her face distorted with fury. "I'll drag her down. I'll disgrace her. I'll have her thrown into jail."

Rage, even the most righteous, cannot but affect the spectator painfully. Norma had been by years of daily sight used to thinking of her father and mother as related only through their children, had been forced in spite of herself to see that her mother was far from the dawning day's more enlightened ideal of womanhood, was of the older generation's less exacting type, while her father had kept pace with the world's swift development. Nor could she, though by no means the most critical of daughters, deny that her mother had refused, resisted even, the best possible opportunities to progress and develop. Yet Norma was no partisan to her father; his abrupt and rude proposal shocked her more and more profoundly, as she reflected on it. "He'd never be doing this if he hadn't been infatuated and edged on by another woman," she said to herself. Women, whatever they may say for men's benefit, all share in the feminine delusion of sex vanity that the woman alone is responsible for the ensnared male; Norma felt that her mother's characterization of Juliet Raeburn was hardly exaggerated. "Only a bad woman," thought she, "ever so much as looks at another woman's husband." Yes, her mother was right; this woman was entrapping her father for his money only. But how could he, the strong, the noble, permit himself to be dragged into an intrigue? That mystery shook her faith in all men, strengthened her honeymoon-born suspicion that love, as men understood and felt it, was a vastly different emotion from what she had been thinking, was coarser, less elevated and elevating, was perhaps degrading. First, Joe; now, her own father— "I feel as if I were on the

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verge of some horrible discovery," she thought, sick at heart.

Sophy's ravings were gradually subsiding, as Norma sat dumb, lost in the black fog of her own thoughts, and so gave her no fresh fuel. "Your turn'll come," her mother was now saying to her. "You won't be new and fresh forever. A few years, and you'll look back on to-day, on your heartlessness, and be ashamed of it."

A shudder of disgust went through Norma. If *that* were love, all of love, then she would despise the man who felt it, would feel abased by having inspired and submitted to it. Charley now came in, swelling and swaggering. "I've been thinking it over, mother," he at once began. "And it seems to me, if he wants to go, the best thing for us to do is to make him get out quick. I can never again feel toward him as a fellow should feel toward his father. And you must despise him. Every time you looked at him, you'd think of the vile thoughts going on in his head."

"He's been led away by that low woman," insisted Sophy, dismayed by the defection of her one sure ally.

"Don't you believe it, mother," said Charley authoritatively, in his innocence of the workings of woman nature. "I was out there in the woods with them, and the very minute she found out he was a married man, she froze up. And before that, she positively kept out of his way—out of our way, I mean. We had to force ourselves on her, almost. I tell you, it's his fault—nobody else's."

"You don't understand women, you little fool," retorted his mother angrily. "That was part of her cunning. Women can always make idiots of the men if they want to."

Charley was forced to abandon that point, though unconvinced. "Anyhow—if—if he—wants to go, why

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—let him! Good riddance! He's never been much in this house, anyhow—always thinking about his business—shut up in the library in the evenings. No, he'll not be missed."

Sophy and her daughter glanced furtively at each other; both reddened, as each thus surprised the other in the same thought—that the house itself, its luxury, all the luxury which had enswathed them, all the money which had been promptly supplied to gratify their smallest material fancy, to provide education for the children, and the social environment that was regarded as the best—all, all had been supplied by the man whom this boy was now saying "never amounted to much in this house." In the strained silence Charley had time to reflect, saw his own blunder.

"Of course, he has provided for us," he hastened to add. "But the law and public opinion would have compelled him to do that, if he had tried to get out of it."

"Indeed it would!" exclaimed Sophy, with a triumphant look at her daughter. "You can't even put forward that excuse for him."

"Has Norma been trying to excuse him?" cried her brother, turning on his sister with a frown. He now felt himself the head of the family and the arbiter of its opinions.

"No, I haven't," retorted Norma hotly. "But mother is trying to make out that I have, because I can't forget he's my father." Her indignation swelled. "Yes, he is my father, and since you force me to say it, mother, I can't but feel that if you had done your share, this would never have occurred."

The instant the words, so useless, so unwise, were out, she repented them. Her mother and her brother trained upon her the lowering look for the traitor.

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"Turned against your own mother!" sneered Charley. "Shame on you, Norma! Shame!"

"Instead of trying to make matters worse between father and mother, hadn't you better try to heal the wounds?"

"Matters couldn't be worse. Father has forfeited all claim on us," retorted her brother loftily. "If you had real good sense, you'd see it's impossible for matters ever to be again as they were. All mother can do is what she's going to do—refuse to get a divorce from him. He can't get one from her. So there'll be no public scandal, and things'll go on just as they are—he an outcast from us."

All at once it burst upon Norma what it was they were thus frankly discussing—the rending apart of the bonds that are the sacrest, the destruction of the home. And they were dissecting the situation, not with aching, mourning hearts, but with anger and recrimination and mental reservations of repulsive materialism. She hid her face in her hands. "Oh," she moaned, "this is frightful. Frightful!" Yes, the foundations of their family life must have been flimsy and rotten, thus easily to give way. And again her sympathy went out to her father. "He's going because he can't stand it any longer. If it hadn't been Juliet Raeburn, it'd have been some other woman, sooner or later. And maybe she, bad though she must be, will give him something better than he's been getting here." And now she pressed hard against the door of her mind to keep back the thoughts that were trooping in, their ugly disloyal faces smirking—thoughts of how her mother had degenerated in mind and in looks ever since she could remember; thoughts of the confusion and slovenliness and wastefulness of her mother's housekeep-

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ing; pictures of her father again and again starting an outburst of exasperated protest and suppressing his anger and going away that he might not be tempted to set a bad example to the children. And there, before her eyes, sat her mother, her own self's arch accuser—her mother, slovenly in dress, indifferent to all that must be incessantly seen to if intimate life is not to degenerate toward the sty and the den. Norma, saying in a suffocating voice, as excuse for leaving, "I'll be back," fled the room.

"I hate myself! I hate myself!" she muttered "Mother'd not have been like that if *he* had done his best to keep her what a wife should be. It's *his* fault for he has the better mind and the stronger character. He hasn't done his duty as a man, and, like a coward he's skulking from the consequences." Yet was it just deeply to blame him? He had had his own part, the living, to look after. She had let him outgrow her, was bitter because he, too, was not a rotter. In flying from her wasn't he only human? . . . It was all appalling and repulsive to her—and most repulsive was her own disloyal self, criticising her parents. Of the many penalties for having a thinking mind, not the least heavy is its refusal to bow to illusions, however satisfying, however sacred.

XII

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

RUSHING forth in flight from herself, she sought instinctively the little summer pavilion, overhanging the river and the valley. Not until she was in its very entrance did she see that some one was there before her—her father, his hands clasped behind his back, his erect figure rigid, his gaze fixed upon the horizon. At the sound of her foot upon the threshold, he slowly turned. At sight of her his expression changed to one that smote upon her heart. She had inherited many of his mental characteristics, but physically she was her mother at seventeen; and before him there rose a vision, shaken wholly free from the dust of long years of oblivion and bright and distinct as at its first appearance—the vision of Sophy advancing through the tall grass of the meadow, her flowerlike face radiant with the light that streams upon the beautiful human countenance only in life's morning. The other hours of a life even down to evening's dusk may have each its own kind of charm; but none is so altogether lovely as that first full morning hour when day closes the dark door of night behind her and stands forth with the dew sparkling in her tresses.

"Father!" murmured Norma, half stretching out her arms to him.

The look of pain shifted and his face became immo-

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bile again. If his wife had been dead, that vision of her youth would have lingered, might perhaps have become a permanent fixed illusion with him—for we usually remember the dead at their best. But Sophy was a living fact; and to remember what she had been was to shrink the more coldly from what she was, as the falseness of a found-out friend is aggravated by the recollection of the feelings he once inspired in us. Death alone can expiate a violated ideal.

“Father!” Norma repeated appealingly.

His face softened again. A slight smile, amused, cynical, hovered over the sternness of his eyes and lips. “You have seen your mother,” he said, seating himself.

“Yes.”

“And your brother.”

“Yes.”

A long pause; then he: “I count on your good sense to keep you from doing or saying things that will encourage your mother in hysterics for the benefit of others. I have not acted without reflection. What she and I are about to do is the best possible course for us both, is as necessary to her comfort as to my happiness. We both realize that the present conditions are intolerable. There is but the one solution. Fortunately, it is complete and entirely satisfactory. If you came, as Charley did, to discuss the matter with me, I wish to tell you discussion is useless.”

“It’s none of our business, father.” Wistfully, “If only there were some way to avoid the—the gossip and scandal.”

“That rests with your mother.”

“Won’t you see her again, father? Won’t you talk with her again?”

He reflected before inquiring, “Why do you ask it?”

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

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“Because I think— It was nothing she said, simply an instinct that she’ll talk more calmly now—now she has had a chance to—to get used to the idea.”

He reflected again. “I’ll be in the library the rest of the day. There’s a good deal of straightening out of papers to be done. If she wishes to see me, I’ll go to her.”

There was no sign of dread of the strain of an interview. Evidently he felt that he was simply conducting a business negotiation with some one in whom he had no personal interest. Norma saw this; but it gave her no shock, no sense that her father was hard. Instead, it somehow justified him; how could he, so generous, so responsive to her own love for him, feel thus toward his wife unless there were reason for it? It seemed to her he, the strong and the clear-sighted, was simply brushing aside the cobwebs of convention from the affair, the misleading veilings of what conventionality prescribed as the “proper” thoughts and feelings and actions in such circumstances, and was looking straight at the facts, and was acting fearlessly upon them, as they appeared to him. This relentless disregard of the fetishes that have dominion over all but the strong and simple and direct, both terrified and thrilled her. It is not in human nature to refuse tribute to strength, whether it be found in the company of good qualities or bad; strong fighter for god or devil is always equally admired—and fighter for devil has the added charm of the soldier of a cause foredoomed to defeat. Was he right or wrong—bad or good? She was not sure; but, whichever and whatever he might be, she was proud that he was her father.

Her young disposition to foment herself with the feeling that a tragedy was enacting, could not with-

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stand the soothing quality in his equanimity. They walked back to the house together talking quite naturally of indifferent matters. At the library door he said, "I'll see mother right away."

He put his arm round her, held her close to him for a moment, then kissed her on the brow. And she understood all that was in his heart—the things she could not speak, the truth as he saw it about his wife and about his right not to be tied throughout his life to the body of death, but to be free to live his one chance at life as he wished, as his powerful voice commanded him to live it.

"Thank you, Norma," he said. He turned hastily into the library, but not before she had seen that his eyes were glistening.

Norma expected—and feared—she would find her mother reading the Bible—feared, because she had learned that when Sophy was determined to occupy high and inaccessible ground, she got out her Bible and read it diligently. Norma was, therefore, relieved at seeing her composedly at fancywork. And she had done her hair, had washed her face and hands, and had got into a cool house dress that would have been becoming had it not been much too heavily laden with that least artistic and showiest of all the laces. She had two prime resources in her practical moods of trouble—novels and fancywork. She abounded in sentimentality; so she liked as a counter-irritant and solace the love story about life as it is not lived though romance readers and the whole "literary cult" do strive valiantly to try to live it that way. Sophy was a great novel reader; but she was even fonder of fancywork—not of doing it, but of doing

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at it. All forms of sewing are a more or less complete rest for the mind; fancywork guarantees absolute stoppage of thought, which must suspend while the intricately aligned procession of stitches makes its continuous march past.

Thus, Sophy's emotions had subsided, leaving behind only a mournful expression, as the ebb tide is still imaged in the sand. When her daughter entered, her look of woe became actively self-conscious. Through it she frowned reproachfully as at an unwelcome interruption. The frown was not a pretense; she did not wish to resume her former state of mind. It would be altogether artificial, now that nature, stimulated by Murdock's most attractive material proposition, had downed the conventional impulse to think and act as a respectable woman would be expected by a respectable world to think and act in circumstances so abhorrent to respectability. Women are the Levites of conventionality; but, like other priestly castes, familiarity with the altars they serve inclines them to be reverent of the cult in form only, to be almost, if not quite, infidel at heart. Mrs. Murdock's instantly snatching up her mask of woe at first sight of her daughter was followed by a slower laying it down; of what use to mask when the incomer was a woman also, and her own daughter?

"He wants to see you again," began Norma. The "he" was a planned compromise; she feared "father" might irritate.

Sophy looked alarmed and angry.

"I'm sure he'll say nothing that will distress you, mother," Norma hastened to add; and she spoke earnestly, as if engaging for her father's good behavior.

"I never want to set eyes on him again," said

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Sophy energetically. "And I'll never, never consent to give him up. Never!" And she bent to her fancy-work, as if the matter were concluded.

It was at Norma's lips to say, "Perhaps it won't be necessary to give him up." She forebore, because she felt it would be cruel to raise false hopes. Instead, she said, "I'm sure, mother dear, if you and he talk again, you'll come to a better understanding. For the sake of Charley and me, won't you see him?"

There was a knock at the door, which Norma had closed behind her. Norma opened it. There stood Murdock. "I have some things to say to your mother," said he with grave politeness. He entered—and there did not live the human being who could have refused to yield to his insistence; it had the inevitable quality of the unopposable phenomena of nature. Norma, as she left the room, sent an appealing glance first to him, then to her mother, the true peacemaker's look that soothes and softens and irritates not.

He seated himself, looking toward but not at his wife; his gaze wandered uncertainly over the elaborate centerpiece she was making; he recognized it as one he had seen in her hands from time to time for years. "Sophy," said he, "on thinking it over, I find I was too abrupt this morning. I had known so long what was in your mind about me that it seemed natural to talk as if we had discussed it before."

The sight of him—his face and figure particularly youthful in a dark-blue suit of handsome rough cloth, his linen, his tie, his hair, all suggestive of youth and regard for taste—the sight of him set her jealousy to flaming somberly again. She forgot for the moment the satisfaction of freedom and wealth, the mountainous troublesomeness of a revengeful course. "It's

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no use for you to talk," retorted she. "I won't take part in any immoral bargains. I realize that I've got to meet my God in the Great Day. And so have you, Charles Murdock!"

"Sophy," he said gently, "for the sake of the children, let us settle our affairs quietly. I will see that everything is arranged for you. In your heart of hearts you wish to be free from me."

His words echoed pleasantly in her ears; they were a simple statement of what seemed to her sense and truth. "It ain't what you wish or what I wish," replied she, "it's what a Higher Power wishes."

"If you were going to lose anything by it in a material way," continued he, imperturbably, "I'd admit you were right. But you will gain, not lose. In every way you will be better off."

Her hands were resting listlessly upon her fancy-work. She was reflecting.

"Suppose," he went on, "I were to withdraw my offer, and insist that we resume the old life."

Her expression stopped him. He had suspected, believed that she was in fact as eager as he to be free; but he had not known it. Now, her telltale face, her alarm at the very suggestion of resuming the life of husband and wife with him, assured him beyond faintest doubt he was right in his idea that he could not feel as he did toward her unless she felt the same way toward him. There is no such thing as a magnet with one pole long dead and the other alive; and jealousy after marriage is a passion of vanity, not of love.

"Sophy, at the very suggestion of our being husband and wife again doesn't your instinct, your conscience tell you it would be a sin in the sight of God?"

She did not reply immediately, and he waited until

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she should have absorbed his subtle, yet altogether sincere argument. "But," she finally said, like one who wishes to be overborne, "we must think of the children, of the example we set to them and to others. We made our bed; we must lie in it."

"Since it was, as you say, we that made the bed," replied he, "then we can unmake it. Sophy, let's put aside the nonsense that might scare us if we were poor, obscure people, dependent on others for bread. We can't be trampled by those who never lose an opportunity to demonstrate their superior morality at the expense of anyone that can't strike back. They'll never disturb you; they'll cringe before you. We are strong enough to do as we wish." He rose and went slowly toward the door, his hands in his coat pockets, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. "Think it over," said he. "I'm sure that, when you do decide, it will be for what is sensible, what is best for us both."

"We've made our bed; we've got to lie in it," she repeated, but her tone did not fit her words.

He saw he had said enough, had succeeded in leading her to face the facts with him—that she was as willing, if not quite so eager, to be free as was he. "Don't decide in a hurry," he said in his practical, hysteria-forbidding, sense-encouraging way, and left her.

Crossing the entrance hall, he saw Norma on the front porch, apparently setting out for home. He called to her; when they met in the doorway he asked: "Would you mind if I gave you the Whitney Place at Point Helen instead of this? I think perhaps your mother would prefer to stay on here."

"Certainly," replied she instantly.

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"Thank you," he said gratefully. "Shall I see you again before I leave?"

"Joe and I are dining at the Hargraves."

"Perhaps you'll be in New York soon. My address is always The Gotham."

At "New York" her face clouded; his eyes shifted. After he had gone on into the library she still stood there, fogged in those dark, dreary clouds of fancy that rise from any melancholy situation to shut out the light, to fill the heart with vague forebodings of disaster. "But I must go home," she thought, rousing herself. "No, I must first tell mother she is to have the house." And then it flashed on her that she was really the bearer of a bribe, a gross material bribe from her father to her mother. For was not the Eyrie the most magnificent, the most dominating place in that region, the local synonym for luxury? She turned from the stairway that invited her to ascend to her mother; she started across the lawns toward the road down the bluffs. At the edge of the grove she halted. "No, I must tell her. It's my duty to do everything possible to avoid scandal."

The air was fragrant with heavy autumnal perfumes. All about her, far as the eye could reach, stretched beauty and tranquillity—sparkling river, graceful, gently sloping hills, tier on tier, the rich greens and grays and browns and yellows of the well-tilled fields. And there was the splendid house, so luxurious, apparently an ideal home for a happy family able to enjoy all that is good in the world. She looked round, sighed. Then she gave a short, bitter laugh.

She returned to the house, found her mother again in a state of suspended mentality over the intricacies of the centerpiece. "Father has given me another

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place instead of this," said she, with burning cheeks and eyes downcast. "He says he wants this for you."

As her mother did not reply, she looked.

Sophy's listless countenance there was an expression of covert satisfaction. Evidently, her father had measured the character he was dealing with. "Well," Sophy now said, with a pretense of mournful resignation, "I reckon it'll be as comfortable here as anywhere. My thoughts are more on the next world than on this."

XIII

"SHE CARES EVEN LESS THAN HE"

As lunch time drew near Sophy began to worry about facing Murdock again—how to act, how he would act, what to say should he address her—for, of course, she would not speak to him first, nor so much as glance in his direction, unless he should compel it. Above all, what should she wear? Just why this seemed important she could not have told; but she felt that it was, and ransacked her wardrobe, wonder-struck Katy assisting.

It was an extensive wardrobe—extravagant, as most of its contents were never worn. Sophy was one of those women who are always seeing "just what *I* wanted" on some other woman, and after getting something as nearly like it as they can, are disgusted with the result. There are women with no taste in dress who fancy their taste matchless. Sophy knew her own lack; her delusion took the form of the hope that others would not realize it, and she encouraged this self-deception because her vanity would not permit her to ask, or suffer Norma to assist. Choice of costume for this important luncheon finally narrowed to a black dress covered with jet and a pink with many flounces and much lace.

"The black's too heavy for such a hot day?" said she interrogatively to Katy.

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"It suggests a funeral, ma'am. I think the pink's elegant and younglike."

"The black," decided Sophy promptly and with some acidity. "It's low and common to dress out of one's time of life."

"Lor', ma'am, you ain't so old," urged Katy with the sincerity of the simple truth. "And there's nothing to be mournful about."

"The black," insisted Sophy. "I shall never wear anything but black again."

Just then the butler knocked. Katy went for the message and returned. "Mr. Murdock asks to be excused from lunch. He's too busy with clearing up."

Clearing up! Sophy sank down at her dressing table and her tears ran freely. "Clearing up! Oh, Katy, I'm miserable!"

Katy pretended to be astonished—and, indeed, she did begin to wonder if the "upset" was not far more serious than the servants had discovered. "Is Mr. Murdock going to be gone long?" asked she, eyes sparkling with curiosity.

Sophy with difficulty restrained herself. She had the habit of confiding everything to Katy, though she had been warned that the girl was a tattler; but for once she resisted. "I don't know anything about his goings and comings," replied she tartly. "I wasn't thinking of him."

"Eat a good lunch, ma'am, and you'll feel better. Nothing makes a body so low-spirited as an empty stomach."

there's "I'll take my lunch here," said Sophy. "No—for lunch, Charley. . . . Tell him to go down to Norma's it'd be so. I don't believe I can eat anything—unless ne nice cold fish—with jelly—and a cucumber

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and tomato salad—with plenty of dressing—and, maybe ice cream—and only one piece of cake. I'll indulge myself a little to-day, as I feel bad; I'll take coffee with cream."

"That'll do you good, I'm sure," said Katy with enthusiasm.

Sophy ate heartily and, so effective was the combination of acids and cream, went almost immediately afterward into a stupor—a nap, she called it—from which she did not awaken until nearly four o'clock. Her head was aching fiercely and her heart was beating and fluttering like one buried alive and trying to break open the coffin. "Oh! Oh!" moaned she. "His carryings-on are killing me. It just shows how sensitive I am. Here, I thought I wasn't affected by his wickedness hardly at all; and, all the while, my nerves were in pieces."

Meanwhile Murdock had sent Simcox to the station to make arrangements for the trip. Except the destruction of certain piles of papers on the floor and the packing of certain others on desk and table, he was ready for departure—for final departure—though he had been working less than three hours. During those hours he was too engrossed by the business in hand to indulge in any reflections upon the impending utter disruption of ties which had seemed so close for so many years. When the work was dispatched, and he had leisure to think, still he had no inclination to reflect on the tragic side of what he was doing. Such reflections would have seemed to him, and would have been, sheer, shallow theatricalism; and Murdock had either the time nor the pretentiousness for the play within the play that most people find necessary in the effort to conceal *their insignificance* in the real drama.

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of life. His chief sensation was of relief. He was glad to go; the dead past had buried its dead; his place was with life, with the living, with the future. And that chiefly meant—Juliet Raeburn. When, where, how, he did not know. But that she would be his, and speedily, he no more doubted than he doubted his memory of the look he had twice seen in her dark-gray eyes or the power of the inflexible will and the ingenious mind that had thus far carried him wherever he had wished to go.

Simcox, returning from the station, met Charley hesitating at his father's door. The young man looked relieved at sight of him. "Father hasn't gone yet?"

"I don't know, sir," said the gaunt, funereal valet.

Charley, with all his father's instinct for rule and none of his father's force, had the air of the futile child as he frowned fiercely and stamped. "Answer me!" he commanded.

"I don't know, sir," repeated Simcox respectfully. One glance at him should have been enough to convey that he was as inviolably mute as the grave he so vividly suggested.

"You *do* know," cried the youth. "Why lie to me?"

"Thank you, sir," said Simcox, not a change in his slow, quiet monotonous voice or in the leatherlike skin of his face. "My duty is never to know nothing."

"He's in there," said Charley. "Open the door."

"Yes, sir—if you'll stand aside, sir. But I can't let you in."

"I must tell him mother is ill—very ill," persisted the young man, though he knew Simcox, knew Murdock's power over him—so great that Simcox, a drunkard of twenty years, had on entering Murdock's service

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reformed after one fall, saying: "Liquor don't have no charm for a man when he can see that there eye of Mr. M.'s a-basilisking at him from the bottom of the glass or bottle, as the case may be."

"I'll tell him, sir. My orders are positive."

Charley made way. Simcox entered the dressing room door, closed and locked it behind him. He went through to Murdock who was at the library table. "Mr. Charley wishes to see you, sir," said he.

Murdock leaned back in his chair. With one of those swift shifts of his from hard to soft he suddenly became tender, and his very eyes seemed to be the outlook of a different soul. He had no illusions on any subject, not even on the subject of his children. He knew his son through and through, knew that he was haughty and arrogant, not proud and masterful, was without real force—was "just what is to be expected of the sons of men like me." But at the same time he took pride in his real merits, his good looks, his truthfulness—though he could not but admit that truthfulness in those who have nothing to gain by lying, nothing to fear from telling the truth is hardly more of a virtue than chastity in an unsought woman or fidelity in an infatuated and accepted lover. His impulse was to see the boy, to talk with him. Yet what could he say? To soften the boy toward him would be to alienate him from his mother. Murdock reddened, turned his face so that Simcox could not see. It had suddenly flashed upon him that, however he might prate about his right to be free, to lead his own life, to rid himself of a weight which it was destruction to carry, still the truth remained that he could no longer face with straight eyes and honest words this boy of his. His brow clouded and his jaw set.

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"He wants to tell you that Mrs. Murdock is ill," interrupted Simcox.

Murdock's mood changed instantly—eagerly. Men who habitually reach directly for essentials through the fog of nonessentials that baffles most of us seem to be attended by a sort of fatality which causes essentials to advance to meet them. Murdock had chanced to cross the hall just as Sophy's luncheon tray was on its way up to her. "Ill," he therefore now said to himself. "Naturally." Then, turning toward his valet with his usual inscrutable face: "Tell him you have delivered the message, and send him away."

Simcox obeyed, and in a moment returned to report on his trip to the station. The agent had got a dispatch from Chicago that but one private car could be taken at Saint X, because two were already on from Chicago, and a third, that of the president of the road, must be taken up at Cleveland. "As it is, Mr. Murdock," explained Simcox, "they'll have to crowd the ordinary passengers into the Pullmans like sardines. And Mr. Berkeley, sir, spoke for this evening before you did." He did not add that the agent had said that if this private-car business wasn't stopped, "the road'll be given up to haulin' rich thieves about, each with his own car just as if cars was carriages."

Murdock took hints of an adverse decree of fate as mandates to resistance. "Order a special, to precede or follow the express," said he.

"They can't do it, sir. The express runs in two sections, and there ain't room for no more without breaking up the whole service. Mr. Berkeley's man was there, sir, and he made the suggestion that you might prefer Mr. Berkeley's company, anyhow."

There was a click of the soundless bell on the tele-

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phone at Murdock's elbow. It was Berkeley, inviting him—"I'll be glad to take you as far as Albany. I switch off there for Canada. Why go to New York, anyhow? Why not come with me? My family'll not be along."

Murdock debated. Now that an alternative offered it came to him that, until Sophy's mind was adjusted to his plans beyond power to change, he would do well to go where she would not be jealously wondering and speculating about his doings. Yes, Canada would be wiser; undoubtedly, Simcox corresponded with some one of the servants at the Eyrie, and so Sophy would hear only news tending to keep her jealously quiet. "I'll go with you, Tom," was therefore Murdock's decision. Then to Simcox: "You heard? Please change my baggage accordingly. Mr. Berkeley and I will fish and perhaps shoot."

Within an hour Sophy had the news; as it came when the morphine digestive tablets were putting her at physical ease, she, without understanding why, began to cast a lenient, longing eye upon his proposal to make her rich, free, and tranquil. In vain she reproached herself for thus quickly regarding unshocked such an immorality as divorce. Hers was the normal conscience; it responded only to the conventionalities as to right and wrong. And soon she was reflecting: "It certainly would be sinful in the sight of God for me to go back to him. I guess ma and pa's teachings were right. There's more fashion than real religion in the church we go to now. The old way of looking at those things was the religious way."

She heard the bustle of his departure; but she had not the imagination to feel its significance, to have even that pang of the melancholy of the thing that is finished

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which strikes through people of sentiment, even though they are relieved and glad. But Murdock was not escape that pang. He left the Eyrie, unmoved, feeling no differently than when he had left it for brief business journeys. He passed the house where they had spent all but the two first and the last years of their married life; his only sensation was relief, for his only memories were distasteful. At the railway station, as he stepped down the long platform toward Berkeley's car, on coming, Norma advanced through the darkness. Her face was suddenly and mistily revealed by a passing trainman's lantern; he halted. Memory flashed before him a vivid picture of his bride coming to Saint X to meet him—his girl bride springing into his eager arms through just such a dimly lit darkness as this. And he lost control of his features, of his feelings.

"Father—oh, father," cried Norma, weeping on his shoulder.

"Forgive me, dear," he muttered, sobbed, rather. "I have to do it. I don't know what it is inside me that drives me on, but I couldn't turn back if I would."

He clasped her close to him and then drew away and rushed from her. And Norma knew that, if her mother had made one single appeal to his heart, she would have broken his purpose. "But she didn't," thought Norma. "She cares even less than he." And then she felt ashamed of her woman's harsh judgment of woman—but could not dispute its justice.

XIV

"WHAT A BEAST YOU ARE, TOM"

MURDOCK, in camp with Berkeley, a hundred miles northeast of Quebec, was soon gratified by a telegram from his lawyers which assured him that matters were progressing. Sophy had accepted Bailby as her lawyer; suit had been begun and it had been arranged with the court that neither party need appear in person, and that the papers would be sealed.

"How could we get along without the lawyers?" said Murdock to Berkeley that afternoon. "No matter what a man wants to do, his lawyers fix it for him."

They were canoeing in the upper edge of the lake, in the deep shadow of the mountain. A breeze that was the breath of the vast unbroken wilderness of spruce and pine and hemlock and fir made their labor the keenest delight. The faint splash of their paddles echoed from the cliffs, so still was it. Now and then a mysterious sound from the depths of the dark forest told of some wild creature abruptly changing its lurking place. Far away, at the eastern shore, flocks of birds never seen near the haunts of man were stalking and swimming about, tranquil and beautiful. These surroundings, so remote from, untouched of, the passions and prejudices and plottings of men, brought out the dormant reflective side of Murdock's nature, restored his sense of proportion, cleared his judgment. In Europe men accept privilege

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as part of the immutable order of nature and society, because they and their ancestors to the farthest generation have never known anything else, and the idea of equality seems an Utopian dream of the philosophers. But in America, especially in Western America, where equality once existed, and still exists as a tradition and a hope, the men who have acquired privilege can recall the time when privilege did not exist, can appreciate its injustice. They accept it; but not as a right, rather as a temporary favoritism which they are more or less ashamed to enjoy. Murdock, deep in the great wilderness, was seeing both sides of his enterprises. This news of the eagerness of lawyer and judge to do his bidding made him here smile cynically, where in civilization he would simply have accepted it.

"Damned rascals," he went on, aloud yet all but unconscious of Berkeley, "but damned useful."

"Thinking of your divorce?" said Berkeley.

Murdock kept his stroke, though the remark was a bomb.

"Didn't think I knew, eh?"

"Hadn't given the matter thought."

"I'm out of business except for a little flyer in Wall Street now and then, to meet current expenses. And I have to be mighty sure I know just how the cards are stacked, or I don't go in. Yes, I'm clear out of business, but—I have to be in touch with what's going on among the insiders. I've got sense enough to know that in this day a fellow with anything worth taking has to keep on guard, or they'd soon have him in his shirt. So I still get my reports. That bit of news about you came in one of them this morning."

Murdock was wondering at his own stupidity. He could not plead in self-excuse that he did not know that

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everyone in finance, great and small, "shadowed" those in whom he was interested or might be interested. He himself did it, knew from many an experience how difficult it was to keep anything a secret.

"It probably won't get into the papers," continued Berkeley, assuming that this was the thought troubling the silent paddler behind him. "It's not regarded as honorable to peach to the public about such matters. It does no good, only stirs up talk of the loose lives of the better classes. The papers publish too damn much of that kind of thing. They're edging the people on to ask all sorts of fool questions about how it happens that some are so rich and have so many luxuries. And not one of the envious dogs would work as hard as you and I have for twice our money."

"So it was hard work that did it," said Murdock ironically. In his critical moods he was cynical about the gospel of magnates and their toadies and their dupes that great wealth and great labor are child and parent.

Berkeley grinned. "Anyhow, I've earned my rest," replied he complacently. A few minutes of silent paddling, and he began again with: "Gad, Murdock, I envy you your nerve. I've almost changed my mind about divorce. I can see there's something to be said for it. . . . I haven't told you, but *she* has begun to cut up rough."

"Bessie—or was that her name?"

"Jessie—hell! I don't mind her flare-ups. They're amusing. All women have a fondness for private theatricals, and Jessie, passing as an actress—though I doubt if she ever was on the stage, even in the chorus—Jessie goes in for tantrums heavy. Her latest play is to be jealous. She pretends she loves me, threatens to have it out with my wife—threatens all sorts of things."

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"Better look out," suggested Murdock absently Berkeley's "affairs of the heart" did not interest him. "When a woman's got nothing to lose and everything to gain by notoriety——"

Berkeley laughed easily, cunning in his good-humored, sensual face. "On the contrary, she's got the most powerful interest in the world to behave—the man's interest. There's nothing that dose, raw or properly coated with respectability, won't do with the fair sex. I don't mention that sex invidiously—it'd be quite superfluous to say money in some form will buy any part or all, of any man. It's a rotten world, Murdock. But jolly—getting jollier every day."

More silent canoeing, each man absorbed in his thoughts; then Berkeley again interrupted Murdock this time with, "No, I was referring to my wife, not Jessie."

Murdock did not give the encouragement for which he paused.

"In a way," he proceeded, when his desire to talk recovered from the rebuff of his companion's silence. "my domestic affairs are in apple-pie order. That again—Murdock, would you think it was in *her* to ask—a blackmailer?" Berkeley stopped paddling, leaned half round in the canoe, all but upsetting it.

"Mind what you're about, Berk!" exclaimed Murdock, moving just in time to prevent a catastrophe. "This water is ice, and I'm not dressed for a swim."

"Yes, sir, a blackmailer," resumed Berkeley, his back squarely to Murdock once more. "That's a strong word, but not too strong. Do you wonder I say the whole world's rotten? As you know, I've always stood stiff for the home and against divorce. But, damn it, I almost tempted to doubt my principles. . . . Yes, s

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she's trying to blackmail me. Some one sent her an anonymous letter about Jessie—and another matter or so. She said nothing to me. She didn't tear up the dastardly letter, and forget it, as an honorable woman would have done. I tell you, Murdock, she's been ruined by wealth—dragged right down off the pedestal into the mire. She hired a lawyer to have the stories investigated, and the skunk got her the proofs."

Now, it was Murdock who suspended paddling. Berkeley had his entire attention, at last. What if Sophy should happen to——

"If he hadn't been a young beginner," continued Berkeley, "he'd have come to me with 'em, instead. But he missed his chance to make a career. Anyhow, she pounced on me. When she opened up, I was ready to die. Yes, sir, I was covered with shame that that noble, spiritual woman should have caught me leading—an ordinary human life." Berkeley laughed loudly. "Oh, what asses the ladies make of us, Charles—what wag-eared, braying asses!"

They paddled slowly a few hundred yards in silence; then Berkeley resumed in a gloomier tone: "Thank God, she and I ain't got any children. Wealth's the ruination of the women and the children. But, as I was saying, instead of rearing on her pedestal and smiting me to earth, what do you think she did?"

Murdock did not inquire.

"She proceeded to try to blackmail me," said Berkeley. "She said I must make her independently rich, or she'd squeal! Think of that, Murdock——"

"Don't turn round!"

"A man's own wife—the pattern of all the virtues, as he supposed—a lady by birth and breeding—and acting just like a—a Jessie!"

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"Don't dig that paddle in so deep!"

"But what do you think of it?" demanded Berkeley.

"She seems to have borrowed a leaf from your book."

"Not a bit of it! She never learned that from me never! I've never let on to her. I've kept my home clean—clean as a cloister. I've encouraged her high-platitude talk. I've let her create an intellectual and artistic atmosphere that nearly gave me the sleeping sickness."

Berkeley lapsed into gloomy contemplation of his heroic but useless self-sacrifices. It was some time before he roused himself to resume. "When I found she was plain dirt, like the rest of us, I got right down to business. You'd have thought it was Jess and me having a go, Tenderloin rules. She stuck out for a big slice of my fortune—independence and no scandal, or scandal and alimony."

"Well?" said Murdock, the first sign of interest had shown.

"I'm thinking it over."

Murdock smiled grimly at the roll of self-indulgent fat at the collar of the outing shirt of the man in front of him. He had not been associated in business with Tom Berkeley all those years without fathoming his character. He had too often seen this prodigal in person pleasures crouch down and thrust out his whole arm of quills when approached for any sum, however small, for other than his own direct use. Murdock's sympathies were all with the wife; so he said, as if the matter were settled, "Well, Tom, there's only one wise course."

Berkeley bristled. "What's that?" he called over his shoulder gruffly.

"To accept her terms and make peace."

"Not by a damn sight!" exclaimed Berkeley, muttering the canoe shiver and rock in his fury. "Anythin'

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she might ask—that is, anything in reason—anything she might ask, for affection. But not so much as a plugged nickel for blackmail. No, I've got my plans." He was silent again; when he resumed there was in his voice the bluster of defiance to anticipated criticism. "You see, Murdock, in her train of hangers-on there's a young chap, an artist—mop of hair, low collar to show his classic throat, soulful eyes rolling over the bridge of his violin——"

"Carruthers?"

"That's the baby. About fifteen years younger than she. Jessie put me wise, but I slapped her mouth shut. I don't allow anybody—least of all a woman of that sort—to think I'd tolerate talk against my lawful wife. But—I didn't fail to hear what Jess said before I clapped the stopper on."

"There's nothing in that," said Murdock, cold and curt. "And you know it."

"But, damn it, man," protested Berkeley, astonished at his usually astute partner's obtuseness. "I've got to have *something* on her. I ain't going to be robbed without a struggle. Besides, I'm not so cocksure she hasn't been up to some sort of hankey-pankey. A woman that'd try to blackmail her husband would stoop to most anything. The fact that she's cold with me don't prove that she— Anyhow, damn it, she's human."

"You're judging her by your own standards," said Murdock. His tone was so contemptuous and offensive that it pierced Berkeley's hide and reached flesh that could feel.

"To be sure I am," retorted he. "And why not? I'm coming round to believe there's only one standard—just the plain human standard. Given the same con-

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ditions, Murdock, and one human being'll act exactly like another. What's character, after all, but the result of the material conditions that compel and mold a man or woman this way or that? And among our sort of people, what are the conditions? You know as well as I do."

Murdock did not especially like Florence Berkeley. He appreciated why she had become the cold, rather supercilious woman she was, disdainful of all men of her husband's world; but he was none the less disagreeably affected by her manner. Still, he was then struggling with an impulse to knock Berkeley out of the canoe and thrust him under whenever he came up until he drowned. "He oughtn't to be let live," he muttered.

"What?" asked Berkeley, who had confided to get advice and wished to miss nothing.

Murdock felt he owed it to Mrs. Berkeley to restrain disgust and contempt and do what he could toward helping her. "If you should be insane enough to attack her," he accordingly said, "it'd prove a boomerang. It's cheaper and wiser, as well as decent, to give her what she wants and let her get a quiet divorce."

"Never!" snarled Berkeley. "Never! Damn it, she's *my* wife. She belongs to *me*! While I know her for a whited sepulcher, she makes a devilish fine appearance. It's true, she's a slim woman—slimmer than when I married her. Still, she knows how to carry the clothes. And she's got a fine broad bosom—something to spread out the jewels on. To set off jewelry right, a woman's got to have bosom. Yes, she's a credit to me. She keeps up the house well, attends to all the show end, and my comfort, too. A man can't be enjoying himself all the time. He's got to rest, to take things moderately."

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Murdock changed an exclamation of repulsion into a cold, insulting laugh. "What a beast you are, Tom!" he said, in restrained comment on the reminder of Berkeley's most abhorrent characteristic, his deliberately measured vices, rigidly regulated so that his health would not be injured.

"Man is an animal," quoted Berkeley. "We learn that when we first start to school. And I am a rational animal. Now, *she* provides me with a—a rest cure, as it were," continued this modern, scientific *roué*, regulating his monstrosities by the laws of hygiene. "I'd have hard work to replace her. Besides—" He laughed genially—"I don't want to marry again, and a man that lives my kind of life has to have a wife for safety's sake."

Murdock turned the canoe in the direction of camp. But Berkeley, unconscious of his mood or indifferent to it, proceeded to explain what he meant by "safety's sake." "Wherever I go, it's known I'm a married man," said he. "So any lady that tried to put up a game on me—breach of promise, common-law wife, and all that—wouldn't have a leg to stand on. Marriage is a great protection, Murdock. I'm surprised that you're cutting loose. You'll simply have to go to all the bother of marrying again and getting another woman used to you."

Murdock frowned and compressed his lips. In his eyes the lightning began to play.

"You're the one-woman sort of man," pursued Berkeley. "You must have got a bee about a woman, some particular petticoat——"

He glanced around, laughing. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the storm about to burst. "But, about my affairs, Charles," he hastened to say, his tone apolo-

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getic and soothing. "I'm undecided, and I want your judgment. I rather think I'll threaten her with a suit for divorce, naming that fiddler chap. That'd quiet her for she's as sensitive about her reputation as a hen about a brood of one. Did you ever hear of anything so low?"

"I never did," said Murdock, his voice as contemptuous as a kick would have been.

The back of Berkeley's neck, red from tan, became crimson. "I don't mean that," he replied, sullen but not daring to resent. "The way she's acting justifies me in anything. The idea of a woman's dragging family relations down to the level of business! I've always been a stickler for keeping business out of my home life——"

It came over Murdock how utterly useless, how stupid it was to rage against this thick-skinned animal as well reproach a pig for grunting and wallowing. He checked his wrath, and interrupted coldly: "I warn you, Berkeley, not to play any dirty trick on your wife. She's too good for you—other people know it, if you don't. Why, God damn you, I'd be one of the first to attack you, if you did such a vile thing!" He was in a glow of righteous indignation.

Berkeley gave an angry sneer. "Seems to me, old man, you've got your hands full at home just now." Then, frightened at his audacity with a man so dangerous, he hurried on with, "I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to meddle. You had a right to say what you thought; I asked you to."

If he had seen Murdock's face, he would have been amused; for Murdock's sense of proportion and sense of humor did not halt at his own threshold. Cant and pretense and harsh judgment are so familiar a part of our daily routine, we are so used to hearing and to

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speaking them, that it takes more than an ordinary shock to awaken us. Murdock spent the rest of that journey in trying to satisfy himself that his own case was radically different from Berkeley's.

The canoe was close in shore before their camp when Berkeley went on, "I begin to think you're right, Charles. I've about made up my mind to offer to compromise with her for half what she asks on condition she drops the divorce talk. She'll accept. She don't want to marry anyone else, and nobody ever talks divorce unless he or she has another marriage in mind."

Murdock reddened at this shrewd shot, so sly that he could not resent it.

"Yes, I'll make her that offer. She's sure to accept. Then, I can have Jessie here next week. She'll bring Viola—or somebody else—whatever style you'd like."

"No, thanks," said Murdock. His anger had gone. "Tom can't be anything but himself," he was reflecting. His long experience in utilizing his fellow-beings had taught him that they must be accepted for what they are. The workman who spends his time and energy in trying to make over his tools does not get far with his work. Besides— Well, who was he to sit in judgment on anyone? And who could judge between husband and wife? "I must and will be free." His qualms were merely in the last, deep-lying, dying remnants of the "roots of an early training in narrowness and ignorance."

"Then Jess'll come alone," Berkeley was saying. "But won't you feel rather out of it?"

"No," replied Murdock. "I'm going the day before she arrives. I'll join Langdon's party in the Adirondacks."

Berkeley showed that he understood by suggesting,

"Why not simply send off Simcox? I'll ship my man, too, if you say so."

"No," said Murdock.

However, the day he fixed for leaving was such ideal fishing weather that he waited over, and Berkeley drove him to the station in the trap that was to take back Miss Pomeroy. Her train arrived fifteen minutes before the train that was to take Murdock's car, which had been sent for him. As she descended, with her octoroon maid close behind her, Berkeley's good-natured face lighted up, and at the extreme end of the long thrust of his piglike nose there was the quick, slight twitching that would have been repulsive had it not been so humorous, so suggestive of the close kinship of man and the lower animals.

"Don't she know how to get herself together?" demanded he of Murdock. And Jessie certainly was looking well, with her black-and-white check traveling dress that brought out every good point of her full figure, its skirt sweeping clear of her big-buckled tan shoes to show the prettiest of ankles in the most diaphanous of tan silk stockings. "It's a joy to put money into her—though I know she's up to mischief every minute my eyes ain't on her. And I like her expression, too—bold and free. The sight of it always makes me feel as I do when the opera's over and I'm let go out into God's free air again. Pity that sort of thing can't be combined with respectability. If it was, I think I could sing 'No place like home,' and mean it."

Murdock advanced with Berkeley to greet Miss Pomeroy. She gave each in turn two fingers of her left hand, calling orders to her maid over her shoulder the while; she had observed a fashionable woman perpetrate that rudeness in the station at New York a few hours

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fore. "Wish I'd let Vi have her way and come along,"
d she, her accent and manner an amusing *mélange* of
oadway and Fifth Avenue. "She's mad about you—
ks of nothing else!"

Murdock bowed formally; his ruddiness was not alto-
ther from without.

XV

DERAILED

THE train trailing Murdock's car was rushing southward through the wilderness. He had finished lunch and, with cigar and coffee, sat watching the swiftly changing scenery. The air poured in at the windows deliciously fresh and fragrant; his imagination was stimulated by the contrast between his immediate surroundings of civilization's luxury and the reaches of untouched nature but a glance of the eye away—the haunt of deer and moose and wild bird. Success, especially material success, usually comes so toilsomely and bears so many ills in its train that the winner, hardened and embittered, looks on his prize as about the sorriest of life's sardonic jests at the expense of those who take it seriously. But there were moments when Murdock had a sense of his elevation high above the masses of his fellow-men, a sense of his ability to compel and to appropriate the services of thousands on thousands, and to surround himself with luxury and obedience.

In those Canadian woods and waters he had renewed his youth in its fullness, had resumed it with an appreciation of its value, its possibilities, its power, which a boy's inexperience never has. Youth! And he was speeding southward, still young and unbroken, toward the bright goal of his manhood's ambition. His eyes shone, a proud smile relaxed the latterly almost habit-

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ually somber strength of his features ; his heart dilated. Youth! Freedom! And soon he would be absolutely free, free to claim the woman who now more than ever seemed to him the dazzling crown of reward—would be free to claim her, would claim her, would possess her and be possessed by her——

It had been raining throughout that region, and the overworked track walkers had been unable to do their duty. The train, behind time, took a sharp curve at express speed, tore a rail loose, shot through the air, rolled down a hillside, collapsed in a shrieking, straining, blazing pyramid upon the bed of an old watercourse. Atop the heap of splintered, riddled coaches for ordinary people lay Murdock's private car, of triply-braced steel, upside down but almost uninjured.

As the train left the rails, Simcox, in Murdock's bedroom, was hurled under the bed and so protected there that he was unhurt beyond a few bruises. Motion ceased ; steam and heat from the flames began to penetrate ; he pulled himself together. The inverted car was full of steam and smoke. He heard the groans, the screams, the yells of the other servants, and not quite so piercingly horrible sounds from far beneath, from the passengers buried, trapped, impaled in the ruins of the other cars, and there burning to death. But Simcox was not thinking of them any more than he was thinking of himself ; he crawled and fumbled about until he felt a human body, felt the texture of material he recognized as the suit he had laid out that morning for his master. He lifted the body to his back and, on all fours like a beast of burden, crawled out of a window. The wind lifted for an instant the hot black fog saturated with the smells of burning wood and roasting flesh ; Simcox stood erect, steadied himself on the tottering

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wreckage, took his unconscious master in his arms and leaped and slid to the ground, out of danger. He laid him on the turf well to one side, returned to the wreck. He gave no heed to the appeals, the screams, the moans. He saw a man shoot his daughter, then his wife, then himself as the flames swept round them to roast them in slow agony. He passed opportunity after opportunity to help entangled passengers. He had but the one idea—his master. He toiled away at the wreckage, dragging out curtains and upholstered seats; in two trips he bore away enough to enable him to make Murdock comfortable. Then he dashed here and there in the smoke-palled confusion until he found a doctor attending three mangled women.

"You can't do them any good," he said in a voice of rough command. "Come with me to Mr. Murdock. If you can save him, you'll get a fee worth while."

"Murdock?" repeated the doctor. "*Charles Murdock?* Was he in that private car?"

"Charles Murdock," said Simcox. "Hurry!" And he seized him by the arm to drag him along as if he were refusing to go. The doctor knelt beside the limp form, glanced at the white face, fumbled into the torn garments over the breast.

"Is he dead?" demanded Simcox, his bloodshot eyes following each move.

The doctor continued his examination. Simcox drew a long breath; if Murdock were dead, the doctor would not be examining further.

"Skull fractured—left leg, left arm broken," was the verdict that finally came.

"Will he die?"

"Probably. At any rate, nothing can be done for

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him just now. Let's go back to the wreck." And he rushed away.

But Simcox did not follow; though the doctor's abrupt departure was proof that he thought Murdock beyond saving, Simcox did not lose hope; he had been a professional nurse at one time in his varied career and had too often seen the doomed of doctors come to life, had discovered how little of practical judgment and skill lies behind the pretentious learning of the average practitioner. He stood beside his master, reflecting. He remembered that they had passed a small station a few seconds before taking the curve. He set off at a run, and within five minutes reached the station. The door was open; the one room and the railed-off office were empty. He knew a little about a great many things; one of them was telegraphy. Seating himself at the instrument, he soon got an answer to his signal, sent off a dispatch to Lake Placid for immediate help, another dispatch to Murdock's offices in New York, ordering a corps of the best doctors and nurses at once, and that arrangements be made for the construction of a siding and for forwarding a private car to stand on it and be Murdock's own hospital. In less than half an hour he knelt again beside his master, who was breathing heavily now, but still unconscious. He searched for the doctor, found him bandaging the burned and torn body of a child.

"Finish that quick," he commanded, "and come with me."

The doctor glanced up. He had not looked at Simcox before. Not recognizing him, noting only that this harsh, imperious order came from one of the servant class, he resumed his task without condescending to reply.

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"Come with me, I tell you," repeated Simcox. "Something must be done for him."

"Each must take his turn," said the doctor. "There are only two of us, and a hundred to be looked after."

"You don't hear me. It's *the* Mr. Murdock—Charles Murdock."

"Oh!" exclaimed the doctor in a vastly different tone. "I beg your pardon. I didn't catch the name. I remember you now. Why didn't you speak plainly?" And he hastily finished the bandaging, and followed Simcox. "It shows how upset I am," said he. "I had entirely forgotten Mr. Murdock. Gad, I *must* have been upset!"

But he had his balance again; as he and Simcox hastened along, he gazed quite calmly at the frightful chaos where death was torturing its victims before it claimed them. His whole mind, like Simcox's, was for the one sufferer. He examined Murdock with minute care, Simcox studying his conventional doctor-face with impatience and contempt. Finally he shook his head gravely, as his puffy forefinger traced the outline of the fracture of the skull in the thick, blood-matted hair. "Bad! Bad!" muttered he.

Simcox trembled. He knew enough of surgery to know how bad that wound in that place certainly was.

The doctor glanced at the clouded sky. "He must be got to shelter."

One of the crew of the wrecked train rushed up. "Come, quick, doctor," he panted. "We've just dug out a family——"

"Can't you see I'm busy?" cried the doctor angrily. "This is Charles Murdock."

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The trainman's expression changed. "Oh," said he pologetically. He was all attention at once.

"We must get him to shelter," said Simcox. "It'll e raining in a few minutes. While the doctor works, elp me make a stretcher."

"Certainly—of course," was the ready answer.

He forgot the family whose miseries had been wringing his kind heart a moment before. He and the valet ttacked the wreckage; they had neither eyes nor thoughts for the horrors around them—the moaning, he odors of burned and burning flesh and hair and lothing, the dismembered bodies, some scalded raw-red, ome charred black, the open eyes of the dead with the xed glare of anguish.

"Nothing more can be done except make him comfortable, until instruments come," said the doctor, who ad finished his emergency work. "My bag is buried i the wreck."

The three men lifted Murdock gently to the stretcher nd bore him to the station. As they reached it, a hand-ar rolled up. There were ten men on it, seven of them bviously doctors. Simcox seized upon the one who was he most important and prosperous in air and dress and ad the largest and costliest bag. "Mr. Murdock—fr. Charles Murdock is in here," cried he. "Come on."

The important-looking doctor responded to the name instantly. "Indeed!" said he, keen, metropolitan eyes ghting up in the midst of black brows and beard. His one gave Simcox confidence; he knew it at once as the one of a master man.

As they entered the station, the doctor in attendance cowed; then, seeing the bag of instruments, he exclaimed: "Ah—thank you," and reached for it.

But the newly arrived doctor smiled blandly, ignored

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the extended hand. "I will attend to Mr. Murdock," said he. Then to the trainman: "Conduct my colleagues to the wreck."

The six others who came in the handcar had heard the magic name, glittering and tinkling gold, and had crowded into the bare little waiting room. "Come along, gentlemen," cried the trainman. "There are fifty poor creatures crying for you."

The phrase "poor creatures" was unfortunate. Four of the doctors seemed not to have heard the appeal, but pushed eagerly, almost menacingly round Murdock's couch, like swine at a trough. Two doctors—one old, the other a stripling, stood aloof, looking ashamed.

"Back! Back!" cried Simcox. "The master must have air."

"Yes, stand back, gentlemen," said the doctor with the instruments. His remark was general, but his gaze rested commandingly upon the flushed bitter face of his brother practitioner whom he had displaced.

The trainman's moral indignation suddenly sprang from its slumber. He, being human, understood what was in the minds of these doctors, and it angered him, where in his own mind it had seemed the matter of course. "One human being's as good as another," he shouted. "You people ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Are you going to let those poor creatures in the wreck suffer and die while you fight over this here rich man?"

They followed the trainman. The doctor Simcox had chosen and the doctor he had commandeered at the wreck remained alone with Murdock.

"I must operate at once," said the handcar doctor.

"It would be fatal," protested the first doctor. "I forbid it."

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The handcar doctor looked up at him superciliously. "I think," said he, "you would do well to leave your master's case to the physician."

"I am not a servant of Mr. Murdock's," exclaimed the doctor from the wreck, his dullish brown eyes dancing with anger. "I am Doctor Bellows, of Albany." He turned to Simcox: "I warn you to be careful how you permit your master's life to be trifled with."

The hand-car doctor was busy searching his bag of instruments. "Yes, I can go ahead," said he. To Simcox: "I shall want plenty of fresh water—hot and cold—and at least two basins, or any sort of shallow receptacle. You can get everything at the near-by houses. My colleague here, from Albany, will help you."

Bellows reared to protest. Two men, one of them roughly bandaged, now bore a stretcher through the doorway; on it lay a woman in calico. The handcar doctor waved them back. "No room here," said he peremptorily. "Take her to the shed—anywhere. This place is reserved for Mr. Murdock."

"How the hell can it be reserved for Mr. Murdock?" demanded the bandaged man. "We're all on an equality here, all equal sufferers by the criminal carelessness of this railroad company."

The man at the other end of the stretcher, a train hand, was moving away with his end of the burden. "Come along," he said. "If it's Murdock, we can't get in here."

"But I say we can!" shouted the bandaged man. "Probably Murdock, with his special car, was traveling deadhead. We other people paid our fare. We've got our rights." His sneer into the angry face of the doctor was made the uglier by the stained and ragged

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cloths wrapped about his forehead and ears. "You're a fine doctor, you are, to think of fees at such a time!"

The handcar doctor laughed at him. "Get along with you. A doctor's like any other business man. He thinks of business when there's something doing."

"Who are you, anyhow?" demanded the bandaged man, mollified in spite of himself by the doctor's frankness. So loathed is hypocrisy that the most vicious action loses half its repulsiveness if frankly done.

"My name's Presbury, and I'm from New York."

"Well, Presbury, you're a cold-hearted scoundrel."

Presbury laughed. "Get along with you, my good man," said he cheerfully.

The bandaged man muttered, looked about for supporters for his view of human rights; finding none, he yielded to the urgings of his fellow-bearer. At the name of Presbury, a few slow tears of relief and joy rolled down Simcox's gaunt cheeks and Dr. Bellows drew back, respectful though sullen. He knew he must give way before the famous surgeon, but the knowledge did not lessen his ill-humor. The crow yields to the vulture, but not with good grace. "Anything I can do to help you, sir?" he asked with an attempt at politeness.

"Go along with Simcox," replied Presbury, indifferently. "And get back here quickly—both of you. There's no time to lose."

By half past six—so quickly did Simcox's telegrams work, through the magic of Murdock's name—the siding was laid and a special car, borrowed from a camping multimillionaire a few miles up the road, was upon it, was transformed into a hospital. At dusk a

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train from New York brought two surgeons of the staff of Presbury's private sanatorium and four trained nurses. Nor did the other injured and their friends complain of this favoritism. It seemed fitting that Murdock should have more attention than the commonalty, obscure and without "pull." In Europe favoritism in all its forms maintains itself by means of the sanction of tradition; in America it has a far firmer foundation. The average American feels that it is only human nature to insist upon any and every possible advantage. Also, he has inherited from adventurous immigrant ancestors a gambler's instinct which makes him hope that his turn will come some day. The bandaged man, raging against the "insolence of the rich," got no encouragement beyond a carelessly sympathetic "Yes, it is a damn shame," usually followed by "But what's the use of kicking?"

Bellows, confident that Presbury made a fatal error in operating in such circumstances, and aching from Presbury's bruises on his vanity, hinted to the reporters that Murdock was doomed. This was telegraphed everywhere, concentrating public attention upon the one victim of the disaster who was widely known; even those who had never heard his name were interested as soon as they read that he was rich. Thus, by nightfall that quiet darkened car on a siding at the lonely Adirondack station was in the full blaze of a national publicity which Murdock dying quietly in the ordinary way never would have got. At ten o'clock that night, into that spot upon which the search lights of publicity were so brilliantly playing, walked a woman—a young woman, calm of face and of voice, but with such a look in her wan face, in her burning eyes, that the man on guard at the steps of Murdock's

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car felt a choke come up into his throat at the sight of her.

"I wish to see him," she said.

The man's expression was hesitation. He examined her by the dim light from the lamp in the ceiling of the observation platform. "My orders are—" he began.

"I must see him," she repeated. She advanced so firmly that he could not but give way.

She ascended the steps, stood before the closed door. The guard, watching her, saw that she was nerving herself. She knocked softly. A nurse opened the door. She advanced, so evidently one whose right may not be questioned that the nurse yielded, saying in an undertone, "I guess the doctor wouldn't mind your looking at him. But you mustn't touch him or make a sound."

The young woman made no answer; she had not heard. She went along the passage between the small rooms, stood at the head of the great couch in the center of the large room so that it would be accessible from all sides. In the dimness she gazed at that couch as if it were the bier on which the dead—her dead—was awaiting burial. He had partially recovered consciousness a few minutes before her coming, and was struggling vainly to reconnect the broken thread. Into his nostrils stole the faint odor of her perfume. "Juliet!" he murmured. "Juliet!"

She moved to the side of the couch and sank on her knees. She did not heed the nurse's signals, the menacing gesture of Presbury, who had just entered. "Yes," she answered, clasping Murdock's wandering hand in hers. "I am here."

"Juliet," he repeated. "*My Juliet.*"

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"Yes, dear." And she leaned forward and touched her lips to his hand. "Now you must sleep," she said, her voice like a soothing caress, her fingers passing softly over his brow.

"Sleep," he murmured. He gave a great sigh, and was quiet.

Not until she was quite sure it would not disturb him did she gently disengage her fingers. When she joined Presbury outside the door, he was no longer scowling. "I see you know what you're about," said he. "You are Mr. Murdock's—" He paused for her to add the detail of exact relationship.

"My name is Raeburn—Juliet Raeburn."

"Ah," said Presbury, like a man who is waiting to hear more.

She and he looked intently each at the other. She did not resent the insinuation in his cynical, good-humored, beard-veiled face. "He and I," she went on, "are more to each other than blood relations. Or, rather, I am nothing to him, but he is—everything to me."

"I understand."

Her expression did not change before his look of polite impertinence. "No," replied she. "You do not understand. But that does not matter. I need only explain that if he could speak he would wish me to be here."

"So I heard," said Presbury. Then, "Mrs. Murdock is coming."

"I must stay."

"It is impossible."

"You must make me one of the nurses."

"Impossible."

"Why?"

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Presbury smiled cynically. "The deception will be discovered and—" He made a gesture suggestive of the uproar that would follow.

"I am principal partner in Dangerfield, the dress-maker. I guarantee you against loss. Besides, there is only the remotest possibility that the deception will be discovered. No one"—she smiled strangely—"not even he—knows what he is to me. And if, by chance, the deception, as you call it, should be discovered, you can plead that you, too, were deceived."

Presbury had been smiling his appreciation of her acuteness, especially in going direct to his chief objection—loss—and meeting it. "Oh, you are *that* Miss Raeburn," he now said. "You've done so much for my wife and daughters, it's hard to refuse you anything—anything within reason."

"Thank you," said Juliet, simply.

"And you are the best possible nurse for him," continued Presbury. There was no longer a hint of the insolent amusement. Presbury was not so cynical that he had ceased to be wise. He did not understand; but he did realize that his first suspicions were more or less wide of the mark—more or less.

"How is he?" she now asked. "You need not fear telling me the exact truth."

"We sha'n't know anything definite for several days. The smash he got ought to kill. Again, a man as young and powerful as he is—and with an incentive to live—" That, with a half-humorous, half-envious smile at her beauty, full of the charm of mystery in the nebulous starlight—"Well, he ought to be able to rise from the dead. And he's far from dead, my dear young lady. A man is either alive or dead. *There's nothing between. This man is alive.*"

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"We will save him," said she. Her face had grown more haggard as Presbury thus let her know that only hope remained. But her tone was without a trace of weakness.

"We might be able to do it," replied he. "This mountain air, now that it is saturated with faith and hope, ought to work miracles."

Juliet was glancing at the ends of the temporary track. "This siding should be extended," said she. "The car must be back in the woods, away from the noise of trains on the main line."

Presbury patted her shoulder. "It shall be done at once. Stupid of me not to have thought of it." He patted her again. "You shall stay as long as you like."

XVI

SOPHY FINDS A FRIEND

IN the morning by the first express came Blagden with the dazed and wandering eye that betokens a secret, harrowing anxiety. The news had found the private secretary at Newport, passing his vacation as was his custom, in visits among his rich and fashionable relations. People of their class have learned by experience how rarely those born in wealth have real capacity, how unlikely it is that, if they lose their wealth, they will ever recuperate. In the broad human beings of whatever station give, not as they wish or expect to receive, but as they actually do receive. Used to being sought only to be exploited, they seek only to exploit. Their ideal—and usually their pretense—is altruism. But their best hope is to get something for nothing, their best expectation is at least to get more than they give—whether of benefit material or of benefits spiritual. Blagden was an unusually attractive man, a man of taste, of not a little wit, of excellent address and appearance. That did not save him. Between the loss of his patrimony and the getting of the confidential position hopefully near the rich Murdock, he had been received by his relative on his annual pilgrimage to the gates of his earthly paradise with a patient resignation which would have sorely tried sensibilities not coarsened and hardened

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by lifelong experience of fashionable ways. His aunts and cousins employed him at tasks only by strain of imagination removed from the menial—tasks hardly the less galling because they were congenial—for Melville Blagden was a major-domo born. But the position near Murdock had changed all this; the relatives began to think perhaps there was “some manhood in poor Mel, after all”—which was the human way of indicating that Melville was once more inspiring hopes that, instead of being a pensioner, he would be useful, perhaps very useful. Being shrewd, Blagden sedulously watered this hope, making his relatives and friends believe he was close indeed to “that Western bounder Mel’s in with.”

His cousin, Betty Sulloway, brought him the tidings that spelled disaster for him and death for the hopes of his relatives. “You certainly do have the damndest luck, Mel,” said she sympathetically. “Now, you’ll have to begin all over again.”

Blagden was too crushed to reply. He went gloomily through the palace “cottage” of the Sulloways to his own apartment, modest for that house but far from plainly furnished and decorated. He got himself out of his elegant evening dress and into an elegant traveling suit—the suit from the best dealer in tweeds in London, the shirt and tie from the rue de la Paix. Within the hour he was gone.

So delightfully is life adapted to humanity’s fondness for altruistic pretense, he reached Azure Lake firmly convinced that his chief anxiety was not for himself but for the generous employer-friend who was about to die. After talking with Presbury he felt a little better; at least, there would be time to plan, to look about, to search the ruins for salvage. So pre-

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occupied was he that he passed Juliet Raeburn several times without penetrating the disguise of the ill-fitting borrowed nurse's costume and hair primly done. It was a note in Presbury's voice—a note of consideration and respect—that finally turned his eyes seeingly upon her face. He stared with lips ajar; when he recovered himself, began his smile and made ready to bow, he froze before her gaze so unruffled that his first thought was, "She has forgotten me." A moment's reflection, and he knew this could not be so; at the same time he decided it was the part of discretion to accept her hint.

He did not try to sound Simcox; he had had experience of the valet's tomblike silence that merely echoed a questioner's question. Instead, he skillfully gossiped round among the attendants, with the result that he was soon in possession of the mode of Miss Raeburn's arrival, and of the suspicion that Dr. Presbury had covert reasons for accepting her as nurse, where there were already four, all known in the New York profession—"and none of us ever heard of this Miss Ray," said the gossiping nurse. "Do *you* know her, Mr. Blagden?"—this with a sly smile of anticipation of a sentimental insinuation.

But he was far too prudent to gratify Miss Carley. "What nonsense!" said he. "Mr. Murdock isn't that sort. Women play no part in his life."

Miss Carley laughed; as she had brilliant eyes and fine teeth it was her habit to laugh a great deal, and to rally her three sister nurses—all of whom had rather poor teeth—upon their uncheerful sobriety of countenance. "A man's a man," retorted she. "The stronger he is as a man, the more certain to have a *weakness* for woman—or women. Besides, you should

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have heard your cold, busy Mr. Murdock say 'Juliet.' Why, he's quite mad about her."

"Pure romancing," Blagden assured her. He was curt, now that he had got what he wanted; he did not like Miss Carley's presuming upon his democratic manner to treat him as if he were her equal; also, he was not attracted by her beauty of slenderness, his feminine ideal being of the robust, exuberant type. "Mr. Murdock," he coldly insisted, "was quite out of his mind."

The nurse, expert in New York fashionable class psychology, instantly felt and understood the secretary's haughtiness. She tossed her head, laughed again—a brave show of fine teeth, but in anger. Perhaps, even more than his attempt to put her in her place, she resented his lack of appreciation of her beauty. This was the more unjust in her because her taste in men corresponded to his. She detested the smooth, lean, sinewy type of which Blagden was a fair specimen; she liked the obstreperously masculine, as he the flauntingly feminine—liked bristling hair and whiskers, rough skin, knotted calves and biceps and shoulders, as he liked bouncing hip and bosom, massive leg and arm. She eyed Blagden contemptuously—the contempt divided among his appearance, his "snob-bishness," and his remark. "He out of his mind?" cried she. "No more than I am." She paused to take careful aim before firing her best ammunition: "When did you say Mrs. Murdock was coming?"

Blagden winced, hastened to recover. "To-night, I believe."

And with a formal bow, gracious yet definitive of the nurse's social rank, went away to reflect upon the imminent catastrophe. He saw it was his duty to Mur-

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dock to prevent it, if possible; but how? He turned the problem round and round, could find only one possible solution—to go straight to Dr. Presbury. “I hope you will not insist upon my reasons, doctor,” he began, as they were taking a walk together after luncheon, “but you must send Miss Ray away—before Mrs. Murdock arrives.”

“Can’t be done,” said Presbury. Blagden thought he saw a knowing grin behind those bushy brows and whiskers which though coal black were so crisp that they accentuated the look of cleanness his pallid, clear skin gave him. “She’s the best of my nurses—the only one who takes intelligent interest in her work. Nurses are like all professional women—in business simply to live until they can thimblorig some man into supporting them, and using the business as a blind. It’s difficult to get a nurse interested in a married man. Miss Ray is my sheet anchor.”

“Miss Raeburn must be sent away,” insisted Blagden.

The doctor was watching the swishing trail of a deer flying through the brush. “Miss Ray will stay,” said he, ignoring Blagden’s intentional slip. “She’s the medicine.”

“But when Mrs. Murdock comes—” began Blagden desperately.

“When Mrs. Murdock comes,” Presbury cut in, “she will stay quietly in her car on the other siding that was finished this morning. No one—*no one*—shall see my patient until he is out of danger.” And he looked straight into the secretary’s eyes. “No one,” he repeated. “Not even his wife.”

“Oh,” murmured Blagden. “I see.” Then he added, “Perhaps that will be all right.”

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"You say you spent three years at Vienna," replied Presbury. "But that was since the Ring was built. Now in the old days—" And Miss Ray was not further discussed.

When the night express trailing Mrs. Murdock's car drew up at the platform, Presbury was at Blagden's side to receive her. She descended, Norma and Charley close behind her. "No change," was Blagden's response to the question in their anxious eyes. "Here is Dr. Presbury."

"No immediate danger, madam," said Presbury. "And—hope! Always hope!"

"We will go to him," said Mrs. Murdock, in manner and in feeling the devoted, agonized wife. As she was to be among strangers she was dressed with care, and looked almost unrecognizably different from the intimate Sophy—neater, cleaner, with her fine eyes and her delicate nose and her attractive mouth getting more of a chance to lift her face toward beauty. "We will go to him at once," she said with a sob.

The doctor shook his head inflexibly. "I permit no one to go near the car but myself and my assistants."

Sophy looked up and down the track. No car in sight but those attached to the train. "The siding over there," explained Blagden, "has been extended into the woods, and we've rolled his car and the one we use as far as possible from the noise of passing trains." He had moved to Sophy's side, and his tone was most satisfactory in sympathetic and soothing quality. Sophy gave him a grateful look that thrilled him. He had always admired her, had striven to stand well with her, by no means altogether or even chiefly from motives of prudence.

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"You'll want a second car, madam," said Presbury, "as it'll be a long siege."

"When can we see him?" asked Norma of Presbury.

"When the crisis is past. He must not be agitated."

Sophy and her children gazed at one another drearily. Blagden burned with indignation. He never looked at Sophy, always dressed up when he was about and further, englamoured for him by her surroundings of wealth—he never looked at her without admiring her eyes and nose, her delicate, aristocratic hands and feet, wrists and ankles, and her "sumptuous" charms of figure without thinking what a magnificent woman, what a Juno, she would be, if she but knew the New York art of the toilet. "It takes substance, something more than bones," he had often reflected, "to set off the position her wealth ought to give her." Now, her forlornness the shameless trick Presbury was playing upon her roused his sense of her charms, "so womanly," to its keenest. "A damned outrage," he muttered; and he abruptly drew Presbury aside. "Look here, doctor," remonstrated he, "this won't do! The wife and the children have rights. They come before — before — *that* woman."

Presbury regarded him patiently. "Who is in charge of this case?" said he. "Who is responsible for the event?"

"But——"

"Now, my *dear* sir! Wouldn't it be well for you to do a little thinking before you make suggestions in important matters? Pray, in the circumstances, how could you arrange it to let them see him, without throwing him into violent agitation?"

"But he knows they are here, or soon will be."

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"He is all but unconscious—and will be—must be—until the crisis."

Blagden showed the flaring red his skin of the red haired permitted. "I am an ass," he apologized. Then, "It's really amazing—this lonely place, yet things going on that one would say could not be kept secret even in a city."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Presbury. "Hadn't you better see that Mr. Murdock's family are comfortable, now that their car is in place on the other siding? Have you ordered a second car for them? . . . You may be sure of one thing," he added, with a stern look into Blagden's greenish eyes. "In *no* circumstances will I deprive myself of my one competent nurse."

"I'll do all I can to help you," said Blagden, with an air of generosity.

"I should say that would be wise," was Presbury's blunt reply. "Mr. Murdock may recover." Presbury assumed all human beings acted from motives of self-interest, and he always let them see he was so assuming. In the practice of his profession, he could not afford to humor humanity's passion for the petty deceptions of pose. Pose might be tolerated as harmless and even amusing in the ordinary scenes of the comedy of life; but when the stern issue of death must be faced—then, facts, only facts, hard and clear of all rubbish of sentimentalism.

He departed for Murdock's car; Blagden telegraphed for another car, then joined the family, to recite all the details of the accident and Murdock's exact condition, to give them hope yet not to raise hope so high that disaster would come when Murdock died—and of that Blagden had hardly a doubt. He had thought little

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about the complications caused by the presence of Juliet Raeburn, so occupied had he been in revolving his own future—what should he do when Murdock was dead; how could he turn the imminent setback to his career into advantage? “For the strong, defeats are milestones on the highway to victory,” was one of Murdock’s many aphorisms which had found lodgment in his receptive mind. Now was his opportunity to show he had not gone to school to Murdock in vain, but was indeed one of the strong and skillful to whom belong the earth and its people. What should he do first? Obviously, ingratiate himself with the family, especially with Mrs. Murdock. He had hoped for riches through Murdock, and no doubt Murdock had remembered him in his will; but at most he would get twenty thousand, possibly fifty, maybe not more than ten. Mrs. Murdock would need advice; who so well qualified as he to be her intimate adviser? The secretary began to see at least one possible combination of circumstances that would change his employer’s death from a catastrophe to a benefit.

When Norma and Charley went for a walk, taking on Blagden’s advice the direction exactly opposite to that of Murdock’s car, he laid energetic siege to their mother’s confidence. We cannot but like those who sincerely like us; it is even hard for us to withstand our vanity’s pleadings in behalf of those whose blandishments we know to be insincere. Sophy, absorbed in herself, had given little heed to the employees Murdock always had in train. She had noted Blagden hardly more than the others, though each time he came to Saint X he made a point of being polite to her. Now, however, she was in a mood of upheaval; and in her aloneness and perplexity and agitation she was instantly respon-

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sive to his tender deference. She soon let him see that some secret lay heavily upon her mind and heart.

"Mr. Murdock talks over all his private affairs with you, doesn't he?" she asked.

"Naturally," replied he.

"Then of course you know about the—the disagreement between us?"

Blagden was silent, waiting eagerly for light—which could best be got by pretending he already had it.

"I suppose I ought to be ashamed to confess it," she went on, assuming he knew all, "but a person can't help thinking things. Of course, his suffering has driven me nearly distracted. But I can't help worrying, too, about—about whether he made some sort of foolish will."

She glanced uneasily at Blagden; his expression reassured her. He had been brought up where material considerations are too powerful, too dominant, too vital, to be made the subject of pretenses when they are immediately at stake. It seemed to him not only proper but necessary that in the circumstances she should be anxious. "You have your children, their future, to think of," supplied he tactfully.

"That's it," cried she, rewarding him with a beaming look from the fine eyes. She at once saw that it wasn't for herself she was worrying, but for Norma and Charley.

"Of course," continued Blagden, "I couldn't in honor say anything about his will, about any of his private affairs, even if I knew." The "if I knew" saved his self-respect; for he knew almost nothing of Murdock's really private affairs, nothing at all of his will. His experience of Murdock's character assured him that, whatever might be the relations between the husband and

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the wife, the will could not be harsh or even ungenerous. But to say this might possibly be a cruel raising of groundless hopes; besides, would not saying it end this new and promising intimacy? He ostentatiously pressed his lips together and permitted an expression of gloom to overspread his features.

Sophy began to weep. "You don't know how I have suffered, Mr. Blagden. He was a good man in so many ways. But he didn't appreciate having a good wife and a family that loved him. I forgive him now, but it has aged me terribly—all the anguish he has caused me."

That Sophy could speak thus generously of Murdock when the darkest doubts of him were harassing her was for Blagden proof of the fundamental kindness of her character. But he might have withstood this had she not been weeping. Those of shallow discernment and shallow sensibilities are most easily moved by outward evidences of grief, though outward evidences are significant only as they are suppressed. Sophy wept freely; the sympathetic tears sprang to his own eyes. "Dear Mrs. Murdock," he cried, "I am sure you are mistaken—certainly about the will." And he felt contrite that he had, even by indirection, contributed to her woes. "So far as my knowledge of Mr. Murdock's affairs extends, there is no cause for anxiety about his will."

Sophy dried her eyes. Her voice, with its vesper-bell sweetness, with its note of lingering plaintiveness, was most attractive, never failed to charm not too-accustomed ears. Upon Blagden it had its full effect. Her simple, grateful "Thank you—oh, thank you, Mr. Blagden," made him literally tremble with emotion. He watched her innocent, limpid eyes in a kind of ecstasy. Presently she went on: "I can't but feel that this was

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a special providence. Yes, it was God's way of halting him."

Blagden maintained a respectful and discreet silence. He was not religious, but under the spell of Sophy's eyes and voice and ample charms he began to wonder if some higher power or other had not been interfering.

"What he wanted was showiness," she went on. "And he fell into the devil's trap, as so many men do."

"I can't comprehend it," said Blagden. And his tone of shocked, profound amazement was quite sincere. Sophy, so luxuriant of person, so rich, so grandly surrounded, seemed to him a most unusual woman. What she did and what she said impressed him with all the weight of her wealth. "I can't comprehend it," he repeated.

"I gave him my youth and beauty," said she mournfully. "And he——"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Murdock," he interrupted, in his frank, engaging way. "You *must* let me say, as an old friend, that you oughtn't to think that sort of thing. Why, in New York, women much older than you are regarded as young. Many don't think of marrying until about your age. As for looks, you dress far too old for your years—if I may say it—at least, according to New York ideas. But even with that, you're always spoken of as one of the handsome young married women of Saint X."

In seven years' experience in flattering his way through life, Blagden had learned that subtlety in compliment is a mistake, that ears refined drink in no less greedily than ears coarse the bluntest flattery, if it be not too obviously insincere; also, what he had said to Mrs. Murdock had been genuine. Still, his words star-

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tled him; he glanced at her, ready to draw back. His expression was more than reassuring; it was encouraging. The effect of stimulants is in direct proportion to their novelty to the system to which they are ministered; Blagden could not have found a better subject than Sophy, so long without the stimulant of compliment that it would affect her as wine affects a child.

"You have been living too retired a life," said Blagden. "In trying to do your duty to husband and child you've been forgetting your duty to yourself."

"My life's all behind me," sighed she, longing to contradict.

He smiled with raillery. "You and I, as I happen to know, are of about the same age. I consider myself young and am considered, a young man just beginning career."

She shook her head in faint, reluctant protest against the implication that she, too, had a career before her. "It's different with a man," said she. "The world is made for men. A woman's done at thirty."

There he laughed outright. "You really must not say that sort of thing, Mrs. Murdock. That's the point of view of old-fashioned people, I know; but you and I belong to the new generation. Personally, I take no interest in a woman until she has passed thirty. She is too unformed and unreliable. To be interesting, a woman must have lived a while."

Sophy's azure eyes were indeed alight now. "You are just saying that to cheer me up, Mr. Blagden. Men care for women only when the bloom is on them." She blushed delightfully.

"Men care for women only when they're in bloom," corrected he. "A man of the world wants a woman's *companion*, not a plaything." And his glance lingered on her.

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ingly, meaningly yet with discretion, made excursion from her eyes to her luxuriant figure, to her delicate hands, to her comely feet, to her eyes again.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," she cried, feeling a delicious tickling sensation, of unknown and unsuspected origin, from head to feet. "I *am* glad there are *some* men in the world not altogether low-minded. . . . If I could only get my worry about—about the will off my mind."

"Don't let that trouble you," urged he with convincing warmth. "Not for an instant."

A pause, then Sophy ingenuously showed what was really on her mind. She flushed, lowered her eyes, asked shyly: "You know—*her*? You were in the woods with them—that time—weren't you?"

Blagden blushed painfully. "Really, Mrs. Murdock, I hope you'll not forget the position I——"

"I beg your pardon," cried she repentantly. "But I thought as he and I had practically arranged for the divorce, you'd feel free to talk."

The divorce! Blagden had some difficulty in cloaking his stark amazement. The divorce! Murdock and his wife were going to get a divorce! . . . Instantly, like the stage Satan suddenly projected through a trap door, a scheme audacious yet apparently practicable leaped into his small, quick mind. Used thus far to executing orders from others, and plotting on his own account in petty ways only, he was overwhelmed by this project. Here was indeed opening to practice his wisdom gained from Murdock. "It's my chance," said he to his fluttered self. "Opportunity knocks at the door just once." He hastily brought his thoughts back to the conversation, to Sophy's inquiry about the other woman.

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"I don't mind saying she's not my style—not what we call a lady. But then—" He shrugged his shoulders faintly—"what's to be expected of such people?"

Mrs. Murdock slowly reddened with the effort to utter her next question. "Do you think he intends to marry her?"

Blagden reflected. If he should say yes, it would certainly irritate; if he should say no, it could not but please. It was a duty, as well as a wile, to please one so fine, so gentle, so put-upon. "Men don't marry that sort," said he.

"Then she's just a—a common woman?"

"Really, I know nothing about her—except her—" He hesitated, ventured—"her conduct." He wore a hangdog look now, for he felt he was traitor, sneak, and liar. But he instantly justified himself. "Isn't that woman here?" he reminded himself. "And won't what I'm saying help Murdock to get his divorce if he should live? I'm doing both him and his wife a favor in helping them to rid themselves of each other. . . . He doesn't appreciate this splendid wife of his. He has only appetites where women are concerned—no appreciation of character, of devotion—no gratitude even. . . . I'm violating no confidence of his. . . . By God, a man doesn't sell his soul, his self-respect when he takes a salary as confidential secretary! My relations with him are business matters only. I've nothing to do with his love affairs—his mistresses." And Blagden was in the full swing of outraged virtue.

"I was afraid I'd find her here," pursued Sophy.

Blagden winced. "Mrs. Murdock!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I was. He has put so many indignities upon me. I've no doubt he'd send for her if he were conscious. I thought maybe she'd be brazen enough to come, just

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from reading about it in the papers. She'd want to get near him and take everything she could lay her hands on, perhaps wheedle him into making a will. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Blagden—for you seem like one of the family, having been at our house so often, right in with us——”

“Thank you,” said Blagden, tears in his eyes and heart beating high. “I have no immediate family left, and I never can forget how good you've been to me.” It seemed to him he could dimly recall numberless acts of thoughtful courtesy from her.

“I'm glad you realize how I've—we've felt,” she went on. “As I was saying, I don't mind telling you, I was so sure she'd be here that I'd not have come if it hadn't been for appearances and for the children. As soon as I heard the news I said, ‘The hand of Almighty God!’ And while I've been praying God to spare his life I've no hope.”

“I fear you're right,” said Blagden, his tone and look baldly conventional.

He rose, eager to be gone. He did not wish to be questioned further about Miss Raeburn, and so forced to utter deliberate lies. Also, he must at once confer alone with this newly arrived good genius or bad suddenly projected into his mind, must confer at length, must concert a plan of action; for he had learned from his employer that only carefully planned things have much chance of coming to pass, that the chief difference between the few who lead and the many who serve them is that the leaders plan while the masses fancy things “just happen.” Before he had time or need to invent an excuse for taking leave of Sophy, Norma and her brother returned. At sight of them, both Sophy and Blagden felt guilty, and Sophy looked it. She remem-

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bered the man prostrate on the threshold of death. "He don't deserve anything from me," she thought. "But I can't get rid of the feeling we're husband and wife—no, not even after all he's made me suffer."

Thus do we bring our very guilt itself to bear witness to our superior virtue.

XVII

CHARLEY'S FIELD GLASSES

A WEEK, ten days, two weeks; one day exactly like another, eventless even as to weather. Murdock lay, neither better nor worse, silent and almost motionless, in the grip of death. Juliet left him only when Presbury thrust her out to take the air; and she got such small sleep as nature would not be denied in one of the compartments between Murdock's and the rear door of the car. Presbury and his chief assistant, Dr. Martin, watched her one evening as she paced up and down the clearing beyond the cars, doing the second installment of the two hours' walk Presbury prescribed and, by superintending, compelled.

"Strange case, that," said Martin.

"Unusual," corrected Presbury, "but not strange."

"What does she think about?"

"She does not think."

"Well, then, what does she feel?"

"She does not feel. . . . If she thought, she would go mad. If she felt, she would die."

Martin reflected on this. "Yet," he finally observed, with his best air of the man who thinks he is thinking and thinking profoundly, "yet we sometimes say, and believe, that human nature is essentially selfish."

Presbury smiled the patient smile of one who has lived at one who has merely existed, of one who has felt at one who has merely sentimentalized. "My dear

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young man," said he, "to get pleasure—in the broad sense—is the sole ultimate purpose of all human action. Differences of character are differences of idea as to what pleasure is, and how to get it. That accounts for the saint and for the satyr; it accounts for Miss Ray—and accounts for—you and me."

"A cynical philosophy," said Martin.

"To shallow people," was Presbury's reply, "sensations and truth always seem cynical or else strained. On the other hand, the flapping of the flapdoodle sounds, smells, and tastes just right."

"Well," maintained the younger doctor, "no matter what you say, *I* for one think she loves him."

"Who said she didn't?" demanded Presbury. "One of the difficulties in the way of discussing anything more abstruse than the weather or scandal with the average human being is that he doesn't in the least understand what one is talking about—yet thinks he does. Look at him? Of course she loves him. Do you know what *he* means?"

"I think so."

"Then disabuse your mind of the notion. *I* never saw a genuine case before, and I'm sure you, twenty years my junior in experience, never did. That is, I never saw it to know it. Love, I discover, is measured wholly by what it gives. In passion, the man loves at all, for he gives nothing, and knows it; the woman fancies she loves, because she fancies she has given something—and she *has* given her conventional self—very much, really, but still a little. But when a man or woman gives his or her all—as that splendid woman there has given—" Presbury drew a long breath. "Martin, we have not lived in vain. We have seen what men climb to the tops of the highest peaks in the *hope of seeing*—and don't see."

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The younger doctor looked uneasily at his chief, uncertain whether this eulogy was serious or satiric.

The last traces of the wreck had been effaced by men and by nature; the newspaper reports on Murdock had dwindled to a daily paragraph. Neither Sophy nor her children had yet been nearer his car than fifty yards; the three other doctors, brought from New York for consultation, agreed with Presbury that there must be no risk of agitation.

"This is all very queer," growled Charley Murdock, from the sofa in the general room of the living car, where he sprawled in sullen boredom. "I suppose these doctors know what they're about, yet I must say I never heard of a man's family being *absolutely* excluded. Did you, mother?"

Sophy made no reply. She was at her fancywork. Norma, reading near one of the big open windows, lifted her head to give him a warning look. It seemed to her that, in the peculiar circumstances, the strained relations between their father and mother, it would be most unwise to admit their mother to the hospital car; and if anyone of the family were to be admitted, would it not for appearances' sake have to be she? Charley answered the look with a defiant frown and addressed himself to Blagden, who was just entering.

"Blagden," said Charley, "doesn't it strike you as queer—downright mysterious? Only this morning, as I was circling round father's car, I saw one of the nurses. I called to her. Instead of answering she made off toward the car almost at a run."

The secretary wheeled abruptly to hide his disconcerted face. "The doctors have forbidden the nurses to discuss his condition with anyone," he suggested in his usual fashionable drawl, when he ventured to about

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face. "Probably she took you for a newspaper reporter."

"Perhaps," conceded Charley. "But, by Jove, I smell mystery."

"Now we can have a little bridge," said Sophy, rolling up the fancywork—still the centerpiece.

Late that afternoon Norma, with her mother in the general room of their living car, glanced up from her novel to see Charley making elaborate fantastic signals to her to join him without attracting their mother's attention. She shook her head in an impatient negative; Charley, always a good deal of a nuisance because of his headlong disconnected excitability, had become her sorest trial in that isolation. He persisted in his signaling until she resignedly put aside her book, yawned for Sophy's benefit and said, "I'm going to stretch my legs."

"I wish you wouldn't say such vulgar things," said Sophy, pausing in her fancywork to bend upon her daughter a severe if rather mechanical expression of disapproval. Under the ministrations of Blagden, whose conversation was cast in the fashionable mold of frank audacity, her notions of propriety were expanding; but she still clung to the forms of straitlacedness.

Norma, her temper on edge, with difficulty restrained a sarcasm about the fondness of "nice" people for nasty ideas. She joined Charley and they walked past their dining and servants' car and up the tracks of the main line. As soon as they were beyond hearing of a group of workmen replacing ties, he burst out excitedly: "I knew it, Norma! There's a sure enough mystery, and a damn rotten one. Blagden's a sweet-scented scoundrel, *he is!*"

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"What is it?" she demanded impatiently. "You're always finding mare's nests."

But Charley was too agitated to resent. He hurried on: "I was rummaging among my traps after lunch, and I ran across these—" indicating a pair of field glasses swinging from his shoulder. "I thought I'd go up the hill and take a look round. As I was sweeping the glasses from one point to another, I accidentally focused on the car. What do you think I saw on the rear platform?"

"Father?"

"Miss Raeburn."

"Miss Raeburn!" exclaimed Norma, breathless and staring at her brother.

"Juliet Raeburn — looking like a ghost — but the same woman. Norma, *she* is with father. And they shut mother and us out!"

"It can't be!"

"I tell you it was," insisted Charley. "Do you suppose I don't know *her*? And I know now, she was the nurse that side-stepped this morning."

"Charley, are you *sure*?"

"What do you take me for?"

Norma caught him by the lapel of his Norfolk jacket. "Let's go to the hill," she cried. "Maybe she's still there."

"What's the use? I tell you I looked till I was absolutely certain I wasn't dreaming."

"But I wish to see for myself."

"I say, you *are* upset! What good would your seeing do? You never saw her."

Norma colored violently, but her brother did not observe.

"This must be cleared up at once," fumed Charley,

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emphasizing with vicious cuts in the air with his stick. "She's got to go away—this very evening. Her being here is an insult to mother, to us all. The papers might get hold of it. It's a wonder they haven't already. I suppose she was traveling with him. Well, we'll shut down on this thing mighty soon." And he flung about.

Norma laid her hand on his arm. "Let me think," she said imperiously.

"Think? *I've* done the thinking. I'm going, bang off, to Blagden. I'll give *him* the boot, good and proper. And I must tell mother."

Norma tightened her grip upon him. She could not yet see, through the whirl in her agitated brain, what ought to be done; but Charley's programme instinctively impressed her as what ought not to be done. "I don't think Dr. Presbury——"

Charley whistled. "By—Jove! I'd forgot him. He's in it, too. We can attend to *his* case when he puts in his bill."

"Charley!" cried Norma sharply.

Charley hung his head. "Well," he said defensively, "we all know in the bottom of our hearts father won't pull through."

Norma pressed her hands to her breast. With a suddenness that was stifling it came over her how little they did care about their father, how alien he was to them—to her even, now that she had Joe and her own home and her separate and new life. "Why," she said to herself, "we're no longer a family. We've been a family only in name and appearance, for years and years."

"What are you looking at me like that for?" blustered Charley.

She became conscious that her thoughts were reveal-

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ing in her expression. "I wasn't looking at *you*," replied she. "I was looking at—at myself."

"Of course, I'm sorry—we all are sorry—and we'll be frightfully cut up——"

"Don't let's talk of it—please," begged Norma. "As to this—this—other thing, I can't believe Dr. Presbury would have consented to it unless there were some good reason. We must first see him."

Charley opened his mouth to oppose the plan because it was not his. But its wisdom was so obvious that he checked himself. "Let's go, straight off." He would not have confessed it, but he instinctively knew that his impulses to action, like Sophy's, like those of most people whom necessity does not compel, were scant of breath and short of life. "Straight off! No delay!"

"Certainly," agreed Norma, seeing no reason for delay. "At once."

As they came within sight of the three cars deep in the woods—Murdock's, the car for the doctors and nurses, and the car for the other attendants and for service—they halted as abruptly as if they had been challenged by a sentinel. After a moment's silence, Norma said in a low tone, speaking the feeling that was in her brother's mind also, "Perhaps we'd better turn back."

Just then Presbury and Blagden appeared, walking slowly toward them. Into Blagden's beardless face with its ruddy sensitive skin of the red-headed came a tell-tale look and color. "Not I," cried Charley, and he advanced boldly. Norma could not but keep pace with him. Before he had a chance to burst out in tactlessness, she said to Presbury: "We'd like to talk with you alone, doctor."

Presbury halted with them; Blagden, still looking

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the caught criminal, continued his pacing up and down, but out of earshot. Presbury beamed upon the brother and sister through his crisp black bushiness. "Well, children—what now?"

Charley scowled and, to dissipate his embarrassment and inward quakings, exploded with a bullying, "Look here, Presbury, we want to get at the bottom of this business about the Raeburn woman father's got with him." And he shook his stick menacingly.

Presbury met his eyes calmly. "The only women in your father's party are five nurses. None of them is named Raeburn."

"I know her well, and *I saw her!*"

"There are no women here but my nurses."

"She was dressed like a nurse. It's no use to try to string us further. We understand now why mother and we have been kept from the car. Miss Raeburn must leave at once. Disgraceful!"

Presbury's face remained grave, but his eyes twinkled as if he found the boy amusing. "There will be no change in the attendance on your father," said he.

Charley was not of the wise who never join issue until they are prepared for every possible event. Presbury's "impudence" took him wholly by surprise. While he was swelling his chest and rearing his head and casting about for the reply that would crush, Norma interfered with a gentle, but positive, "We feel, doctor, that we are entitled to an explanation. That is all. I think you yourself will admit it."

Presbury's manner changed to courteous attention as he shifted his eyes from the flushed arrogant boy to the sweet face of his sister. "I have explained," said he.

Charley shook his stick in the air. "Come! Come!" *he cried.* "It's no use to tell us any *more* lies."

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Presbury ignored him; Norma frowned at him. "Be still," she said sharply, "and stop making silly passes with that stick." Then to Presbury: "Please don't think we've come meddling in your affairs. But Charley has seen. He is positive. If trouble is to be averted, don't you think you had better be frank?"

Presbury debated. "You are right," he answered her at length. "But really there is little to tell. I know of no Miss Raeburn. One of your father's nurses is a Miss Ray."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Charley. "That's she!"

Presbury proceeded as if there had been no interruption. "She is indispensable. If he is to pull through, she must remain with him. There has been no deception as to his condition. He is practically unconscious—and has been, except when he was delirious. She watches over him night and day. She does for him eagerly the services the lowest menials shrink from and neglect. As soon as he is out of danger or—" Dr. Presbury paused; Norma trembled, and her brother lowered his angry eyes. The doctor ended in a lower tone, "She will then go at once."

Tears were in Norma's eyes. "She will then go at once." Norma felt it was disloyal, immoral, but she could not crush down sympathy for this woman who would have to "go at once." She recalled Juliet Raeburn as she had seen her in New York—a generous, high-minded woman, if ever there was one—and so beautiful in her strength of self-reliance. What a sacrifice!

The silence was broken by Presbury. "Has your brother told—anyone else?"

"No," said she, blushing deeply.

"Not yet," muttered Charley, with sullen obstinacy.

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"If I may be permitted to advise," continued Presbury, "don't tell your mother. If you do, one of two things will happen: Either she will stay on, with her unhappiness greatly increased, or she will leave, making an unnecessary and painful scandal."

"Not at all!" cried the young man, moving threateningly toward Presbury, who had half turned his back on him. "There is another—the real alternative. That woman will leave."

"She will not leave," said Presbury, and his voice had the hardness of inflexible purpose.

"I say she shall. Norma and I will not protect her. Her presence is an insult to my mother, to us. She must be exposed and driven out."

"She probably cares little whether she is exposed or not," said the doctor, and his expression was strangely unlike his usual cynical incredulity. "I fancy, if she had been that sort, she'd not have come."

Norma began to see the situation from all sides; but Charley burst out afresh: "And you'd let her stay on here, insulting my mother, when you admit she is a—~~a~~ low character!"

Again Presbury turned his attention to the boy. "I did not admit she was a low character, young man," said he, his voice even, his eyes ominous. "The reverse."

"I shall telegraph to New York at once for other physicians. As soon as they come you will consider your service here at an end."

Presbury returned to Norma. It was apparent that the last grains of his patience were fast running out. "Any physician," said he, coldly polite, "would do as I'm doing, Mrs. Degarmo. You'd better use what influence you may have with this boy to prevent

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a nasty scandal. But, nothing any of you do or try to do will change the present surroundings of your father."

"Come on!" cried Charley to Norma. "We'll consult mother, and get physicians with a sense of decency. This fellow is evidently in that woman's pay."

Norma swifter than thought threw herself between her brother and Presbury. The hand, powerful as a butcher's, that reached out for the boy, fell upon her, upon her shoulder, wrenching it, crushing the flesh, branding into it marks that remained for weeks. But she hardly noted the pain, so fascinated was she by the transformation of that usually imperturbable, lightly satiric face into gorgonish fury. Every one of those crisp black hairs of eyebrow and beard seemed to twist and hiss its separate venom. Norma had always ridiculed beards; she saw now why nature had given them to men. But while she was reveling in the tempest across whose path she had thrown herself, it vanished. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Degarmo," exclaimed Presbury contritely. "I beg your pardon." And he was once more the suave, lightly derisive mocker at humanity's twin besetting terrors, life and death.

Before Norma could reply Charley pushed her roughly aside. "I repeat what I said. You are in that woman's pay." And he glared into Presbury's face.

But the doctor was now in control of himself. "As you please," replied he. "Don't let him make a mess, if you can help it, Mrs. Degarmo. I fear I hurt your shoulder."

"It is nothing—nothing, I assure you," said Norma, though the pain was now shooting through her arm and chest.

Presbury lifted his hat to her, walked away.

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"I really ought to have taken one good crack at him," growled Charley. "Did he hurt you?"

Norma laughed sarcastically. "What a disgusting exhibition you are! If I were a man and had made such a fool of myself, I'd sneak away until it was forgotten."

But Charley was too well content with himself to be shamed into reasonableness. "Come along," said he "We must get busy."

"What do you intend to do?" demanded she, the pain goading her to rage against his blundering folly

"Why—that's settled. We're going to mother."

"But father— The doctor may be right."

"And what if he is right? *We* must defend our mother."

They heard quick steps behind them, halted and turned. It was Blagden. Charley flamed out again. He was not quite satisfied with the figure he had cut before Presbury. The opportunity to rehabilitate himself by thoroughly bullying a dependent was not to be neglected. "What do you mean?" he demanded "What do you mean by conspiring to insult my mother?"

In other circumstances Blagden would have resented the insolence of the tone and of the question, for he was courtier only where he gave his respect, and for Charley Murdock he had no respect. As it was, he showed his feelings in his expression alone. "Go slow there Charley," he said friendlily. "I've been doing what I thought was for the best, what I know is for the best Presbury's right. If she's sent away, it's all up with your father. I refused to be responsible for his death."

Charley sneered. "I suppose you've been fetch-and-

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carry between him and her so long that you've lost all moral sense."

With her father's own eyes, so terrible in wrath, Norma faced her brother. "Haven't you any brains at all?" cried she. "You are insufferable! I agree with the doctor and Mr. Blagden."

"Oh, you do!" jeered Charley. "Well, if father gets well, which he won't, you'd be right in it on his money, wouldn't you? But you'll slip up, my dear sister. And you'll wish you'd consulted your pride."

"Pride!" Norma concentrated her full capacity of scorn upon her tone. "So, that is *your* idea of pride, is it?" She remembered Blagden, and was ashamed that an outsider should see this ugly dance of family skeletons. "Leave us, if you please, Mr. Blagden," said she, politely enough but with a distinct suggestion of the tone for employees.

Blagden, whose pride was simply the conventional vanity, was in too great an inward turmoil even to note such a subtle detail. "Certainly, Mrs. Degarmo," replied he, eagerly conciliatory. Then to both of them: "I hope you will spare Mrs. Murdock. I assure you, no matter what doctors you get——"

"Clear out!" ordered Charley roughly. "And don't you worry about our affairs. The doctors we get will do what they're told to do by whoever's going to pay them. You ought to know that—you who are doing a man's dirtiest work for pay."

"I apologize for him," cried Norma, though the secretary's fury did not alarm her as had Presbury's. "Mr. Blagden, I know you've been insulted by this miserable brother of mine, but I beg you, for the sake of father and mother, don't punish him as he deserves."

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"Punish me! I say, that's good," laughed Charley, who was Blagden's equal, perhaps his superior in physical strength.

Norma wheeled on him. "So!" she cried. "You insult men whom you feel confident you need not be afraid of. You wretched coward!"

Blagden took advantage of their absorption in their quarrel precipitately to leave them. "Now," she continued, "we'll go to mother if you insist on making a mess and a scandal. I knew you hadn't much brains, but I never dreamed you were a coward. I knew you were a byword for lack of tact, but I didn't think you'd carry it to the point of murder."

"Murder or no murder, I say that woman and her crowd of low creatures have got to be swept out of mother's neighborhood. I've heard women haven't any real sense of decency. It must be true. But *I've* got it, enough for the whole family. And, by God, this Raeburn woman has got to leave."

Norma was at such a pitch of exasperation that she did not care what happened. "Come on!" cried she. "I wash my hands of you."

But, behind his violent gestures and language, Charley's spasm of outraged virtue was subsiding even more swiftly than it had risen. He had inherited his mother's aversion to trouble, as well as her fitful and capricious temper. Also, he had her fundamental lack of self-confidence, aggravated by the fact that never in his life had he had to act wholly on his own responsibility, with the certainty that the consequences could not be shifted; there had always been his mother to excuse and defend him, his father to protect him and settle the bills. He was much relieved, when they reached the car, to find that his mother was taking a nap.

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"I'll not wake her," said he, in his surly voice the note of weakness that was familiar to his sister.

"As you please," retorted she curtly, moving away from him.

"Hold on. Where are you going? Let's take a walk, and talk things over for half an hour."

"I've got something else to do."

"You know I'm always open to reason," pleaded Charley weakly. He was irritated with himself for having gone so far. Now, he had got himself into the plight that is the frequent lot of those who mistake for will the absence of will shown in bluster, obstinacy, and ill-temper.

"Make a scandal and kill your father, if you like," said Norma, sure that he would do nothing. And she retired to her compartment, to have Katy rub embrocation into her aching shoulder.

Charley, after hanging uncertainly about the steps for a few minutes, heard his mother's voice, and precipitately struck into the woods. Blagden was watching from afar. As the "young idiot" disappeared he hastened forward and entered the car. Sophy, just emerged from her nap, greeted him with her usual affectionate friendliness. He saw at once that she knew nothing, that he was therefore free to adopt the most satisfactory of the several alternatives he had carefully thought out. "You haven't seen Charley?" he began.

"Not since lunch," replied she. As she had come to look upon him as almost of the family, she was not concealing her satisfaction over a new teagown, but was admiring it—or rather, herself in it—in one of the many mirrors wherewith the car was decorated. She was vain of her throat, which looked best in dresses open at the neck; collars pushed it up into a too heavy chin. The

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particular feature of the new teagown was the arrangement of the lace at the neck.

"That's a charming gown," said Blagden, whose chief topic with Sophy was dress and style—and that the talk was interesting and improving was shown by the fact that Sophy had not been so alive or so particular about herself in years, not since before Norma was born. Blagden, with the serious air of a connoisseur on a jury, walked round her, viewing the garment from all points. "Most becoming," was his verdict. "But then," he added in the same judicial, impartial manner, "you've been looking wonderfully well of late. So it's not altogether the teagown."

If he had spoken what his eyes said as they lingered upon her soft white throat, she would have been insulted, ashamed, furious at him. But she delighted in his look, with not the least sense of violated modesty. "Thank you," said she. "I'm afraid it's too youthful."

He laughed. "It always seems ridiculous to me that *you* have grown children."

Sophy was rosy with pleasure. Without in the least realizing it—she would not have permitted herself to realize a thing so subversive of the rigidities she had always preached and had never been seriously tempted to stretch—she had fallen into the habit of looking forward to Blagden's compliments of eye and tone as the most agreeable events in her "melancholy life." A greater factor in her improved appearance than the air and the outdoor life, greater even than the fact that she was now having things to think about, and so was no longer revolving round her three meals a day, as anyone will who lets himself sink to the life she led at Saint X—the greatest factor of all in her improvement was the stimulus of Blagden, really interested in

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her, able to talk to her so that she would listen and could understand.

"How is everything at the car!" she asked. They rarely spoke of Murdock except as "the car."

Blagden became grave. "That recalls me," said he. "I'm glad you haven't seen the boy. He has made a discovery, and I feared he'd tell you and, by taking you unprepared, hurry you into action you'd afterwards repent."

Sophy turned crossly from the mirror. "What now?" she inquired.

"My dear friend, it's a matter I've been doing everything in my power to keep from you. God knows, you've enough to make your heart heavy and sad."

"I suppose he's worse."

"On the contrary, slightly better—though there is still no hope—only the shadow of hope."

"Then whatever can it be?"

"Nothing but the expected in the circumstances. . . . Miss Raeburn is here."

Sophy straightened; her eyes flashed, her nostrils dilated. Blagden saw that he was indeed in for a stretch of extremely delicate driving.

"Charley saw her," he pursued, ignoring the signs that she was about to flare up, though he was inwardly rembling. "She forced her way in—frightful bad taste, wasn't it? Of course, they don't dare remove her. The slightest irritation would kill him instantly. Charley, thinking of you and forgetting everything else, including the danger of a terrible and utterly unnecessary newspaper scandal, is all for ordering her and the doctors off forthwith. But I know you don't want that. It's a very difficult situation, isn't it?"

Sophy had developed a great respect for Blagden,

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as well as liking; she was anxious to maintain his opinion of her, and also she thought his judgment fallible in all matters of "the world." Still, the one he brought set her primal passions to boiling. She did not want to be Murdock's nurse; but that won't do at the post rightfully her own under every law of God and man, that woman watching over him while herself was not permitted even to see him—"I'll endure it!" she cried, in a suffocating voice. "Venerable wife and mother so outraged!"

"You are right, Mrs. Murdock," said Blagden, deeply moved. "It has made me angry every time I thought of it. *Never* was there such a situation! Dr. Presbury, who is the only other person in the secret, is as indignant as I am. But— She would not quietly, even if they dared try to get rid of her. Should she be driven away with great scandal, and with the inevitable result that he will die? Would anything justify us in deliberately killing him?"

"But he knows *I'm* here!"

"Probably not. His mind is very vague. He is really not conscious."

"Then he wouldn't know if she left."

Blagden's greenish eyes watched her jealously as she said with a certain zest, "He has but one idea—that she is there and must not leave him. If you send her away, he will burst into a rage—and die. When I insisted that you be told, Dr. Presbury said, 'You are proposing murder.' He says he himself will throw up the case and leave if she goes. You can see for yourself, that alone would mean a huge scandal. Mrs. Murdock"—solemnly—"on my honor, I believe the doctors are right. It would kill him."

"I don't care! I don't care!" shrilled Sop

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"*He's* nothing to me! Hasn't he dragged me through the depths of humiliation? I will not be outraged by that creature's presence. She shall go, and go at once!" And she blazed upon Blagden. "Do you hear?"

He lost his nerve; but his judgment did not desert him in that moment of peril to all his plans. "Whatever you say shall be done," replied he humbly. "Forgive me, I must speak my mind—my dear friend." And his judgment enabled him to pluck up courage to say, "If he dies, the whole country will have it that you, though about to divorce him, made a scene at his bedside that caused his death."

The ice of this drenched Sophy's wrath. She had forgotten having led Blagden to believe her the aggressor in the divorce suit.

"If he gets well," he went on, feeling his way a little less timidly, "you know how relentless he is. He will justify himself in any tyrannical course; he will say to himself that you demonstrated your utter indifference to him."

Sophy listened limply, encouraged him with a despairing roll of the eyes.

"You can drive her away, my friend," said he more strongly, after a painful pause. "But any punishment you inflict on her will be mild beside what you bring upon yourself. And if he should die, leaving a will unfavorable to you— Would not your having hastened his death strengthen her case? Of course, if he lives— But you can imagine better than I what would happen in that case."

Blagden still felt he might as hopefully be arguing with a runaway horse. He was expert enough at human nature to know that the real motives, even of good

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and worthy people, are not always those so gallantly displayed on dress parade; but he had not yet had the fullness of experience that finally teaches how decisive the motives of prudence always are, if they get a hearing. When he finished she turned, dropped into a chair. "What shall I do?" asked she helplessly. "You've had experience. Advise me."

Blagden, astounded by victory as unexpected as complete, could not immediately frame an answer.

"And Charley and Norma know, too," she went on dolefully. "What will they think of me if I submit to it?"

This gave Blagden an inspiration. "Mrs. Dergarmo has been trying to persuade Charley not to tell you. It may be she has succeeded. If so, you need do nothing but hold your peace. When the crisis is past you can act quietly and with dignity. . . . Perhaps—you will—will honor me by trusting me to act for you?"

"Yes—yes—thank you!" she exclaimed, impulsively giving him her beautiful hand which he took and ventured to press with gratitude almost reverent. Then, "But suppose Charley tells me," she said in dismay. "He probably will. He never could keep anything, and he hasn't any sense. If he had"—angrily—"he'd have kept what he saw to himself, instead of blabbing it and getting ready to worry me with it. Whatever should I have done without *you*, Mr. Blagden? It seems as if God must have sent you to help me through this dreadful experience." And again that slender, delicately proportioned hand of hers touched his.

Blagden, proud and masterful, spoke out in a ringing voice: "If Charley does tell you, order him to be-

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have himself and not draw the family into a scandal. You will easily control him, with Mrs. Degarmo to help you."

Such angry feeling as Sophy had left now took the form of resentment against "that meddling boy." However, with Blagden's eye warningly and encouragingly upon her when Charley came, she contrived to keep her countenance. He gave Blagden a frightened look. But seeing how quietly the conversation wandered among indifferent subjects, he became reassured; Sophy's uneasiness was completely covered from his unobserving eyes by pretended diligence at her centerpiece. With the tea came Norma. She looked inquiringly at her brother who, after a furtive glance at his mother and Blagden, shook his head. "I've changed my mind," he said in an undertone.

She patted his shoulder. "I'm glad," replied she. And when Blagden left, she went with him to the platform to say, "Charley has come to his senses."

"Good! Now all will go smoothly."

"I hope so." Norma gave a dubious, anxious sigh. "I've been praying for the end of the crisis in father's illness. Now I'd do anything to put it off."

Blagden, his generous, kindly instincts roused by her unhappiness, said in a tone that could not but reassure, "Trust me, Mrs. Degarmo. All will go smoothly."

Norma thanked him with a look. And for the moment she did feel encouraged. "What a good fellow Blagden is!" thought she. "No wonder we're always congratulating ourselves on our luck in having him here. If anything happens to father, Joe must look out for him."

XVIII

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EARLY the following morning Charley was awakened by a knock at his door. "What is it? Who is it?" he mumbled.

His mother's voice answered: "I want you to bring Dr. Presbury right away. I can't stand it. That woman has got to go! It isn't decent."

Charley opened the door, stared stupidly at his mother's sallow face and bloodshot eyes. "Who told you?" he demanded. Then, "It was Blagden—the damned hound!"

"Never mind who told me. And Mr. Blagden is a gentleman. But I can't endure it. I've not closed my eyes. I could hardly wait for day. I'll die myself if that woman stays."

Charley, in gaudily striped silk pyjamas, sat on the edge of his bed and stared gloomily at his bare feet. "What if she refuses," he finally suggested, "and the doctor backs her up? You don't want to go off at half-cock, mother. That was a rotten dinner we had last night. It kept me awake till all hours, and I feel like shooting up the place myself this morning."

This humble, even vulgar explanation of her night of anguish and her morning of high moral resolve set Sophy to exploding afresh. She released the dressing gown she was holding together over her bosom

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and wrung her hands wildly. "I won't listen—I won't! Do you want me to die? All night I lay feeling her gloat over me." Her words were borne out by her hysterical dishevelment—corsetless, hair this way and that, eyes rolling insanelly, voice shrill and out of control. Her very nose, usually a thing of beauty, no matter how her other features looked, seemed to have lost its symmetry. "Will you go for Dr. Presbury," she all but screamed, "or do I have to send somebody else?"

"I'll go," said he. "Just as soon as I can take my bath and get into my clothes."

"Be quick!" And she drew his door to and went away.

He dressed hurriedly; but instead of setting out, he went to Norma, who was in their dining car, gazing moodily into her coffee. "Now, mother's on the rampage!" cried he, seating himself but making no move toward eating. "That red-head did tell her. And she had an attack of indigestion last night—it seems to have hit you, too. Anyhow—she says Miss Aeburn's got to go."

Norma drew a huge breath of relief. "Well, at last *something* will happen. It may be wicked to feel so, but I don't much care what." As Charley had said, she was showing that she had passed a bad night.

"You women have no self-control at all, have you?" said Charley. And now he began to eat. "Mother is saying she can't live, if that woman's here. He wants me to dash off for Presbury."

"Why don't you bring him? Let's have it over with."

"There's no need to rush. Besides, I find I'm hungry. The muffins look fine this morning. It'll take

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her a long time to dress, judging by the state she was in when I saw her. And she wouldn't let anybody see her till she's dressed. Mother's getting mighty particular about her appearance lately. . . . Well, I'm glad to see it. I like this Philadelphia butter better than that last. It's not so salt. Just jiggle that button, won't you? I want some fresh coffee, and this milk's cold as charity."

"May I go with you?"

"I wish you would! You know, I rowed him yesterday." And Charley, feeling that the load of responsibility had been lifted from him, fell more energetically upon the breakfast—fruit and oatmeal, a chop, several muffins, two great bowls of coffee. Norma did not interrupt, did not try to hurry him. Not until he finished his coffee and lighted a cigarette did she move toward a start.

"What are you going to say to him, sis?" he asked as they set out through the bright, buoyant, early morning air.

"Nothing—beyond telling him mother wants to see him about—about it."

Arrived at the other settlement, they found Presbury and Blagden breakfasting in the doctor's car. When Norma explained their early visit, Blagden grew white. Presbury simply said, "Um—m!" and smoked on at his long, golden-brown cigar. A moment's silence, and Norma, who was looking out of the window, rose with an exclamation of terror so acute that the three men sprang to their feet.

"Mother!" she gasped, her eyes wide and her hand tight upon her heart.

And she darted out and down the steps, just in time to see her mother wave aside the guard at the

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farther and rear platform of Murdock's car and ascend. Before she could start in pursuit, Presbury caught her sharply by the arm. "No," commanded he. "Let *me* go."

He strode along the narrow path worn in the grass, parallel to the three cars. The others, watching him breathlessly, were astonished to see him pause at the rear steps, glance up at the platform, draw quickly back, then beckon the stupefied guard to come away. When he rejoined them with the guard beside him, he said in a casual tone, for the guard's benefit, "Mrs. Murdock and Miss Ray are talking together on the platform. I'm sending the guard here to the station, to find out whether the express will be on time. I'm expecting some decent chicken and a few duck. Isn't the stuff round here wretched? But then, the country's always a horrible place for feeding."

As the guard drew away from them, Blagden exclaimed in great agitation, "But, doctor, is it wise to——"

The doctor cut him off with a gesture. "Miss Ray," said he tranquilly, "will not permit anyone to disturb the patient."

"But mother may——" began Norma, and stopped because to have gone on would have been to bring too near the surface thoughts about her mother of which she was ashamed.

"Let the two women talk it out," pursued the doctor. "Trust Miss Ray to handle the situation. Let's go back to breakfast. I don't enjoy smoking in the open air." And he waved them up the steps.

In Murdock's car the windows to the south were kept open, day and night, to admit the cool, healing air of the

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forests; the windows to the north were closed and curtained because the path ran along that side. Juliet Racburn, standing between his couch and the closed middle windows—double windows of thick plate glass heavily curtained—heard Mrs. Murdock coming along the path. Those nights and days of almost sleepless vigil had sharpened all her senses; the faintest sound made a distinct impression on her. As she watched, she had been haunted by the two fears, fear of two intruders—the one who could take him from her, the one who could drive her from him. The sound that penetrated to her from the path that morning would not have been heard through those barriers by a normal human hearing, however acute; yet she not only heard it, but heard that it was hurried, that it was feminine, that it was made by none of those who habitually came to the car.

An instant of suffocating tightening at the heart; then her nerves responded to her will, and she went hastily to meet the intruder. As she went, she closed and curtained the three successive doors between the platform and the room where he lay in that baffling stupor, in which he yet seemed to be conscious of her—how else explain the fact that he became restless if she left him more than a few minutes, and quieted the moment she returned? Sophy had just reached the platform when Juliet came out of the car. It was an observation platform, wide and broad; but the two women were face to face and very near. Juliet had the advantage because Sophy was completely out of breath from the haste of her coming and from the violence of the passions which had been roused from lethargy and had goaded her to act for herself.

"You came to inquire about Mr. Murdock?" said Juliet. She saw the guard and Dr. Presbury at the

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steps, looking up at her; she calmly motioned them away. "He is a little better this morning, they think," she went on. "But he's still apparently unconscious."

Sophy, who had been speechless from exertion, was now speechless from astonishment. She had no very definite conception of the appearance of the woman who had "stolen my husband," beyond a general idea that she dressed so that even men observed and admired, that she was extremely beautiful and had a figure of devilish allurements. She knew this woman was the one she sought; yet where was the beauty of dress, of face, of figure? Here was a homely woman, emaciated, gaunt of features, and ghastly pale, and dressed in an ill-fitting nurse's costume that made her angular and hollow-chested. Not a trace of coquetry; a wan, worn creature, with no beauty save possibly a pair of great dark gray eyes that looked at her sweetly and dauntlessly. Sophy was confounded.

"I am Mr. Murdock's wife," was all she could think to say.

Miss Raeburn bent her head in a slight bow. "I knew," said she. "I am one of the nurses."

"Which one?"

A tiny spot of color glowed in each of Juliet's hollow cheeks and vanished. "I am the one called Miss Ray."

In those honest direct eyes, in that gentle voice there was no incitement to wrath. Sophy Murdock had a good heart, and persistent ill health was no longer poisoning it; she could not resist the appeal to sympathy, to pity even, which this woman's appearance made for her. The things she had come to say would not issue. She trembled with embarrassment before Juliet standing silent, courteous. From the bottom of her heart she wished she had not come. "I'm too soft," she said to

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herself. Yet, now that she was there, how go without speaking? She gave Juliet a look of appeal. "Don't you think," said she, with painful embarrassment, "that it's about time his own family took charge of him?"

"It is such a difficult case," replied Juliet, "that I believe the doctors are right. He lies there, hardly moving, occasionally opening his eyes, never speaking. It is very strange and terrible. You would like to see him? If you will make no sound, I'll violate orders and take you in."

Sophy shrank. "No—no," she muttered. "You are very kind, but—that is—no."

"It would only make you feel more unhappy."

Sophy was desperate. She made a great effort and said crossly, "*You* have no right to be here."

"Does it make any difference who is here now, so long as it is some one with strength to do the work?"

Sophy's gaze, after vainly trying to center upon Juliet's eyes, wandered again. "I don't see how you *can* stay any longer," she said, in a helpless, pleading way. "It isn't proper. I can't . . . can't allow it."

"It seems as strange to me as to you that I am here," Juliet replied. "I would go if it weren't that the doctor says any change during this crisis would surely—" She did not finish, did not need to finish.

"Is it so?" asked Sophy.

"It is," replied Juliet. And her eyes and her tone made Sophy feel the black intruder seated beside Murdock's couch, waiting with hideous patience for the least relaxing of effort.

"Oh!" she murmured. The color was out of her face, the anger out of her heart. "I've been thinking they were deceiving me," she added apologetically.

"I know you feel as I do—that we mustn't consider

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ourselves, only him." Juliet, wan, haggard, looked at Sophy with eyes death itself could not have made more moving. "Don't *you* think I'd better stay until we know?"

Sophy paled, reddened; the tears welled up. "I can't be the cause of any harm to him. I can't—I *can't*!"

And without looking at Juliet again, she turned, descended, departed. Juliet stood without motion, her gaze fixed on the point at which his wife had disappeared. She drew a long, long breath, opened the outer door of the car, stepped within, fell upon her knees. With the sobs shaking her wasted frame, she repeated softly, again and again: "Thank God! Thank God!"

Norma and Charley kept away from their mother until lunch. When they, much embarrassed, faced her, even more so, she said in a queer defiant tone, "I've seen her and we've come to an understanding." No one pressed her for an explanation—nor did she press her inmost self where this strange decision had been reached. She felt that her flareout was probably due to the ignoble cause Charley had assigned. As for letting Juliet stay, while it was absurdly not to say immorally out of accord with conventionality, it was somehow in perfect accord with conscience. And she pried into herself no further. There was, however, a cause for the content of conscience, a highly interesting cause, one that would have scandalized her had she known it—another instance of the advantage of not knowing what is going on in one's own mind and heart.

Blagden, bent on having Sophy as near to his physical ideal as he saw she could easily be, had been beguiling her into long and ever longer walks; and his practical interest had been stimulating her to take care of

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herself, to permit and even to urge Katy to make her toilet elaborately. No longer was she slovenly in the morning and dressed-up looking in the afternoon, and at all times suggestive of bulk and semifluidity. Her hair was washed and kept in condition by a preparation supplied by Blagden. Her hands were as presentable as her feet, Katy having got some simple instructions in manicuring from Norma's Celeste. She had a figure once more, large but definite; and her contour was beginning to reappear from its long hiding within heavy cheeks. Even in the case of a woman with no one really generous gift from nature an amazingly small amount of taste and intelligent persistence will produce marvelous results. Where the woman has fine eyes, good teeth, a well-formed nose, a notable skin, and hands and feet that are the envy of every feminine beholder, it takes a great deal of corpulence and dowdiness to extinguish her title to beauty; and a very slight improvement in form, personal habits, and dress goes far toward rehabilitating her.

Without being in the least conscious of it, or of the reason for it, Sophy had been taking on the alert mental attitude of the unsettled woman, as distinguished from that of her who regards her fate as determined for life. She talked and listened more; she thought less lazily and less disconnectedly; she took increasing pleasure in the company of Mr. Blagden—"such a nice young man, so well educated, so well bred, such an interesting way of saying things." The dog wags its tail, the baby crows and chortles, at whomever it relies upon for food; and we are only natural when we soften more and more toward whoever supplies our hearts, our vanities, our souls, with the ambrosia of consideration and the nectar of compliment. In those years when Sophy had been

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abandoned to the fate her indolence invited, made all but inevitable, the fairest part of her nature had wilted and withered—her gentleness, her sweetness, her desire to please. Now, its response was as prompt, as eager, as the earth's to spring's returning sun.

And now that she had seen "the Raeburn woman," she lost all jealousy. "I can't imagine what a man could find in a poor, peaked, pinched creature like that," she said to herself. "I don't wonder Mr. Blagden made light of it." She was "spiritual-minded" and prided herself upon it, and denounced physical attraction between the sexes as coarse and low. But the most spiritually minded will, in their unguarded moments, revert to the plain, every day human standards of judgment.

As she, divested of pose, was enjoying these comforting thoughts about his charmer's lack of charm, she was before a mirror, admiring the figure given her by a new corset with ingenious front and hip lacings. "Mr. Blagden will like this. He notices *everything*." Her maid had been begging her for more than a year to get this corset, but she had refused, because she thought it a waste of money. Now, vanities, even the uncomfortable ones like Agnes corsets, no longer seemed sinful extravagance. "He's welcome to her," she thought, continuing her musings about Juliet. "It's no wonder he couldn't be content with his family—he, with such poor taste as that. She probably looks a little bit better when she's dressed and not so worn out; but nobody need tell me she could ever be what any sane person would call attractive."

She was not analytic—and while not to be analytic prevents growth and progress, it produces the temporary joys of optimism, and is the ideal state for those who wish peace of mind, wish to believe that the profes-

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sions of themselves and others are their practices also. She was not analytic; hence it did not occur to her that for her spirits, for her complete content with the idea of divorce, for her allayed jealousy, there might be a cause as out of place among her Puritan-faced principles for the married woman as Cupid in a convent.

“He’s welcome to *her*,” said she; and, innocent of the subtle significance of the one idea upon the very heels of the other, added: “I hope Mr. Blagden will look in before lunch. I feel just like a walk.” Wholly unsuspecting also was she of her succeeding reflection: “If it was as pleasant to walk out home as it is here, I’d not mind taking old Schulze’s prescription.”

XIX

“ SHE SEEMED QUITE CALM ”

ANOTHER week—the fifth. The family's anxiety, quite exhausted, had fallen asleep; conventional affection had worn threadbare the garment of appearances; wife and children were, as Sophy piously put it, “ prepared to accept with resignation whatever it may please God to send ”—which always means that death would be a welcome relief, though no one is so barbarous as to say, and few are so barbarous as to admit even in thought, that this is their meaning. Norma, out of conceit with the sensitiveness—“ not to say lack of trust ”—which had led her to forbid Joe to come where he might see too far behind the scenes, was beginning to be irritated and a little nervous because he remained so long respectful of her prohibition. As for Charley, he was openly showing his impatience and boredom. “ If this had to be,” he growled, “ at least it might have happened somewhere near a place where a fellow might somehow amuse himself.” Sophy alone was tranquil—a blessing she attributed to the ministrations of a Providence which apparently gave most of its time and thought exclusively to her and her comfort. Never had days passed so quickly, so delightfully as these, most of whose waking hours found her and Blagden together, she the most attentive of listeners, he educating and stimulating her in the subtlest, most entertaining way imaginable. The

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kind of education Sophy needed to modernize her was precisely the kind his mind and tastes fitted him to impart. If it was a rare opportunity for her—this opportunity to be roused and rejuvenated by a person near enough to her own mentality to be understandable and sympathetic—it was no less a rare opportunity for him. He had always been an accumulator of every kind of knowledge useful to the fashionable and the luxurious—how to live, how to dress, how to hold on to youthful appearance and to stave off age. Only from a sense of family dignity was he man of affairs, instead of beauty doctor or major-domo or proprietor of fashionable shop or restaurant. Aside from her physical attractiveness to him, Sophy had him enlisted for her, heart and mind, because he saw ever larger and larger possibilities of recreating her, of making her a new being he could proudly look upon as his own handiwork. In a world where the vanity of creation is the most seductive of all the vanities, what greater charm could one human being have for another?

The thick fog over Murdock's mind had been swaying uncertainly for nearly a week. On the thirty-seventh day Presbury saw that it was not settling back, but was slowly lifting to drift away. The change was slight, but to his experience decisive; the crisis had passed, life and love had won. Presbury knew it was a question not of how many but of how few hours before that intelligence would swing clear of mist, would see its surroundings. But he did not hint it to Juliet.

That afternoon he called her out to the platform and in the tone that asks an explanation said, "You've sent away your trunk."

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"I saw the change," replied she. "He will get well. I may have to go at any moment."

"You'll stay as long as you like."

"You don't understand," said she. "He mustn't know I've been here."

"They—" He glanced in the direction of the other settlement—"They'll tell him."

"I think not," replied she reflectively. "If so—at least I'll have done my best. I want you to promise me."

Presbury shook his head. "I'll have to tell him. It isn't fair to him—or to you."

She gazed with unseeing eyes into that fresh, joyous splendor of limitless foliage, of hills and ravines and far purple mountains. As he watched her, the full force of the heart-wringing contrast, between the woman who had come there five weeks before and she who was about to leave, swept over him for the first time. "If I did my duty," said he, "I'd order you to bed for a fortnight. You've all but given your life for him."

She smiled. "I'm stronger than you think. A week or so up North and I'll be all right."

"And you are going away! It's frightful—frightful," he cried impulsively. "You must have cared for him before, to brave insult and disgrace to come to him. But now, he's to you what the child she's brought into the world is to its mother."

"More," was all she said; but the tone of it brought the tears into his eyes.

"Yes—more," he answered. "Tell him? Why, I'll tell him as soon as he has the strength to hear it."

She turned her mysterious brilliant eyes upon him. "No, you will not tell him," answered she. "You misunderstand why I don't wish him to know. In some

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circumstances—if he were free—I'd be glad. But—” A little color came into her cheeks as she hesitated— “You compel me to explain. I don't know much about his life—his life at home. But I'm afraid if he knew I had come up here he'd be tempted to—to——”

“To divorce her. Why not?”

“That's what I'd have said, before I learned what this experience has taught me. I used to be relentless and—I didn't understand pain because I'd never felt it. Now—after what she did for me—for him and me——”

Presbury understood, and her changed expression showed it.

“You see he mustn't know I was here. You promise?”

“Yes,” said Presbury reluctantly, after a pause during which he searched in vain for an argument to shake her resolution. He saw that, being the woman she was, she could not but go. “Yes, if you insist.”

“I do insist.”

“Yes—I promise.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I know I can rely on you.” And she returned to Murdock's bedside.

Early the following morning, Murdock without unclosing his eyes said in a weak but rational tone—plainly rational because querulous: “Where am I? I've been trying to puzzle it out and can't.”

Juliet, at the head of the couch, rose hastily, and without making the least sound withdrew out of his view.

“Anybody there?” he went on, voice a little stronger and crosser.

Juliet's hands were clasped tightly to her bosom. Slowly she unclasped them; slowly she stretched out one

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hand—so thin, so transparent—a hand that told the whole story of those days and nights of struggle with death for the life of the man she loved. Slowly the hand advanced—slowly and fearfully—until it hovered above his pillow—until it almost touched his hair. Then she drew it back and the two hands met at her lips to stifle a sob—and she went. She had snatched him from death; now life had snatched him from her. Her head swam, her courage fled, and she leaned, sick and trembling, against the wall of the passageway. She must go, without a word from him—without a kiss or even a hand-clasp—must go away—alone—alone——

She heard him calling. She composed herself, went to the platform. Miss Thomas was there. She sent her in, hurried away to the next car. When, a few minutes later, Presbury returned from his early stroll in the woods he learned that she had gone. "She found she might just make the express," explained Martin. "So she left her good-bys with me."

"Gone?" echoed Presbury, dumfounded. He glanced at his watch.

"Oh, she was all right," Martin assured him. "Really she seemed quite calm and——"

"These shallow fools!" muttered Presbury, dashing off toward the station. As he neared the clearing he saw the train; but before he reached it, it was under way. At one of the windows flying by he saw her profile. Its expression he never forgot.

XX

SOME STRANGE NEW YORK ADVENTURES

As he entered Murdock's car he heard in Murdock's voice: "What the devil! What does this mean?"

"Better I see—much better," said Presbury. With a gesture he sent Miss Thomas away.

"Where is the other nurse?" demanded Murdock peremptorily, "I want her—at once."

"Which one?" asked Presbury. "There are four."

"The one that's been here all the time."

"They've all been here in turn."

Murdock sunk into sullen silence. Presently he feebly turned his head and said, "Who are you?"

"I'm one of the doctors—Presbury."

Another silence; then, "Where am I?"

Presbury explained in detail, Murdock listening without comment. "And," he ended, "you can see your wife and daughter and son to-day."

Murdock's frown had deepened to a scowl. "Who has been nursing me?"

"Four nurses—five until this morning. One gave out and had to go."

"Who was the one that was here almost all the time? Oh, I knew—I don't know how, but I knew."

"I think the nursing was about evenly divided. Perhaps Miss Ray, who left this morning, did somewhat *more than the others.*"

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"Ray! . . . Was her first name— What was her first name?"

"Juliet."

Murdock seemed to be reflecting. After a while Presbury heard him mutter: "Yes, I may have heard them call her Juliet." Then to the doctor: "Have I been out of my head?"

"Much of the time," replied Presbury. "The rest of the time in a sort of stupor." As the nurse reëntered, he rose, saying: "Here is Miss Thomas. What time will you see your wife?"

Murdock turned his head, scanned for the second time the bright, pretty face of Miss Thomas, sighed, muttered, closed his eyes wearily. His brows again gathered in a heavy frown.

"When will you see your wife?" Presbury repeated.

"How do I know?" replied Murdock sullenly. "Is it evening or morning?"

"Morning."

"Bring my—my family whenever you like. But they mustn't stay long. I'm very tired."

"No, indeed," said Presbury. "And no demonstrations!"

A smile, grimly satirical, showed through the beard Murdock had grown during his illness. He slept or seemed to sleep. Two hours later Sophy, followed by Norma, Charley, and Blagden, came in. They seated themselves in awkward silence. The sick man's glance went quickly from face to face, returned to the cool, dark-green foliage that almost brushed the car. There seemed to be nothing to say. He broke the painful silence with a question to Blagden— "How's everything in business? But, I suppose you'd not tell me, if things had gone wrong."

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"Of course I shouldn't," replied Blagden. "But it so happens that we've had a quiet summer. Your stocks slumped on the news of your accident, but they've about recovered."

"I'm afraid I've given you all a bad summer," he said, addressing himself to Norma.

"Indeed you have," replied she cheerfully. "But, thank heaven, it's over."

"And Joe?"

"He wanted to come, but I wouldn't have it. We'll take you with us to Bar Harbor as soon as you're able to travel. You'll have the sea as well as the mountains there."

Murdock made no reply. He lay listless, frowning. Dr. Presbury appeared in the doorway. This was the signal agreed upon. Blagden rose. "Our orders are to stay only a minute to-day," he explained.

"That's right," said Murdock, too weak to hide his relief. "Perhaps one of you—say Norma—will come again this afternoon. But I'm not going to allow you to bore yourselves with me. When can I send them all away, Presbury?"

"We'll see about that."

"Didn't you say I was out of danger?" insisted Murdock, irritable at once.

"Certainly you are. But——"

"Appearances, I suppose you mean. Well, appearances be damned. It'll retard my recovery if I've got it on my mind that a lot of people are waiting impatiently about."

"We'll talk of this later. You must rest now."

The family and Presbury withdrew. Presbury was *about* to accompany them to their car when the nurse

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called him. "Mr. Murdock wishes to speak to you," said she.

As he entered, Murdock said, "Are we alone?"

"Yes."

"Now, tell me the truth about the nurses—about that nurse."

"I have told you all there is to tell."

"I wish to see the nurse you say went this morning."

"She took the nine o'clock train. She's well on the way to Canada to visit relatives and rest. I advanced her some money—in fact, all that was due her. I felt her faithfulness had earned her a vacation. Besides, she was really tired out. That's the way it always is. There's sure to be one that's more sympathetic to the patient, and the brunt of the burden falls on her."

A pause, then Murdock said, "I do not believe you."

"As you please," replied Presbury, as if humoring the fantastic notions of an invalid.

"Did Mrs. Murdock send her away?"

"She did not."

"I do not believe you. Mrs. Murdock sent her away."

"All the nurses were here when your family arrived. All are here now, except Miss Ray. She left only this morning, left of her own accord."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"Of her own accord?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

Murdock's face had the puzzled, baffled expression again. "At any rate, you've taken a weight off my mind," said he. "Whatever the truth is, there was—nothing disagreeable."

"My dear sir——"

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Murdock made a gesture of dismissal of the subject. "I'll see Norma this afternoon. They must all go to-morrow. I need no more coddling. Tell Blagden to order an extra operator here and a clear wire to New York or Chicago by day after to-morrow. And—a clean shave this very day."

"The shave—yes. But no business for a week," said the doctor. "Do you want me to drug you?"

"You'll have to, if this machine inside my head isn't to get away with me. Was Miss Ray ill?"

"Only tired. She'll be back on duty in two weeks. She's going to graduate in medicine and enter the practice. If you want to, you might give her something extra. She's worked hard here—and she needs the money. But do as you like. I congratulated myself when I found I could get her for this case. Though, the others have done very well, too—very well indeed."

As he talked Murdock watched him with angry suspicion. But Presbury was not the man to fail in a lie when he determined to tell it convincingly; and he had decided it was best for all concerned, especially for Miss Raeburn, that he should keep to the spirit as well as to the letter of his promise. Murdock gave a sound between sigh and groan; Presbury knew he had won.

"Yes, I've been out of my head," said Murdock, to himself rather than to the doctor. Then, with a complete change of tone: "Tell Blagden to send for Berkeley. I must see him. Also, I want Fullerton—a lawyer in our New York offices."

"All right," growled Presbury, going. "Have your way. Have your way."

When Murdock was asleep he returned and gave him an injection that would stupefy him for twenty-four hours. "They're bad business, these hypodermics," he

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muttered, as he withdrew the empty needle, "but he has got to be quiet a week longer."

As soon as Presbury permitted him to have possession of his faculties, he again insisted that his family should leave. "Humor him," Presbury advised them; and they took the advice with alacrity and cheerfulness unconcealed. Sophy had found herself accidentally alone with him for a few minutes and, while he tactfully saved her and himself from embarrassment by pretending sleep, she dreaded a repetition of the distressing experience. Charley had never before experienced the intolerable burden of week after week of fine weather in inactive idleness; he was as fidgety as a sleepy child that is trying to keep itself awake, and as exasperating. Norma, though really the most impatient, and the most justifiably impatient, to be gone, was the only one of the three to feel the tragedy of this fizzling fiasco of an end to their family life. She saw that the last of the flesh and blood ties had been cut, and she felt the wound—or, rather, to be exact, she felt distress of conscience because she felt no distress of heart. She realized there was no longer any sympathy whatever between Murdock and the rest of them, even between him and herself. She could understand his conduct toward her mother, but she could not forgive it. In theory she held her Joe hers only so long as she could hold him; but in her heart she felt he was hers for all time, rightfully hers, regardless of any change in her which might set him to thinking of wandering. The happily married woman, vaguely yet persistently conscious of—and in dread of—the fleeting nature of feminine charms, resents any infraction of the marriage tie almost as fiercely as a widow who in vain longs and seeks to remarry. Norma had raised between

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herself and her father a barrier as effective as the barrier which his secret plans and desires forced him to raise against his whole family.

When Berkeley came, Norma hastened back to Joe, Charley went to New Hampshire to visit school friends, and Sophy, accompanied by Blagden whom Murdock sent on business, departed for New York to join Mrs. Berkeley and Mrs. Fred Hastings at the Holland House. Blagden had been talking to her almost every day about how diligent and resourceful and successful the fashionable women of the East were in prolonging youth and beauty. He was unable to satisfy her speedily roused curiosity by going into practical details; he knew little beyond the results—women of thirty, thirty-five and forty, of forty-five even and beyond, with the charms of their younger days intact and in not a few instances enhanced. But he had heard enough of the methods to clear Sophy's mind of the popular notion that this prolonged youth was due to superficial artifices, to paints and powders, false hair and pads. He knew, and he assured her, that there were in New York, in London, Paris, Vienna, able physicians and surgeons who devoted themselves to correcting nature's blunders, to repairing the ravages of self-indulgence, to renovating and restoring the bodies of their patients as thoroughly, as radically as an old house is made over into a new. When he first began to talk—of course, taking care to make himself apparently impersonal—she listened with amused incredulity. But after her discovery of Juliet, and her resignation to the impossible situation, she stealthily read the advertisements of the "beauty fakirs" in the New York Sunday newspapers. Blagden had told her of these advertisements, had warned her they were for *the most part* inserted by clumsy or fraudulent imitators

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of the practitioners of a real science and art who did not advertise. So she read to learn, not where to go, but what to do, what could be done.

It is one of the curiosities of psychology, that vanity over a purely imaginary charm ceases the moment some way of substituting the genuine for the imaginary is discovered. Sophy began to see her defects with eyes as sharp as an enemy's, began to analyze her physical appearance, to catalogue good, bad, and indifferent, to survey just what foundation she had upon which to rebuild the impaired structure of her beauty. Her mind was not capable of the higher processes of thought. But it was a good average mind, perfectly competent, when awake, to deal with the ordinary routine, and endowed with that shrewdness which is of more value than intellect in the practical petty-retail business of keeping comfortably alive. Soon she was viewing herself with far less enamoured eyes than was Blagden. He thought her merely a trifle too plump and pillowy, not indeed for his personal taste which was all for bulk, but for the compromise taste he had made between his own and the fashionable fad of leanness. She saw that she must make many and drastic changes, if she was to become the woman she felt she ought to be and could be. Once the idea of improvement, and that for a definite purpose—though she did not disclose even to herself the purpose—became firmly imbedded in her sluggish but practical mind, it flourished as sturdily as pine in sterile soil. Like all the emotions, vanity, a bad master, is a good servant.

In the years when Sophy was thinking about herself with results damaging physically, mentally, and morally, she had not the slightest sense of shyness or of shame; but now that her self-centering promised at

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least physical and mental improvement, she became self-conscious, secretive, teased of conscience. She looked forward to meeting her friends, Florence Berkeley and Henrietta Hastings, with no pleasure; how was she to go about her programme without their discovering her and laughing at her? Yet she felt she must at any cost have some one to back her up. Blagden she could not trust with secrets so peculiar; besides, he would not be available now. Should she confide in Florence, disdainful of physical vanity but discreet and reliable friend? Should she select Henrietta, in sympathy with vanities of the flesh but loose of tongue and sparing no one in her love of ridicule?

While she was still debating into which of these two beds of thorns to cast herself, she made an astonishing discovery. Both Florence and Henrietta were in New York, not to shop, at least not primarily, but to have themselves renovated! The greetings were hardly over before they began to talk of fat and wrinkles, of no hair where hair should be, of hair where no hair should be; of hollows and protuberances; of the dangers in foods and combinations of food regarded by the inexpert, even by most physicians, as harmless; of the dire disasters that lurked in candy, in soda, in all kinds of between-meal eating. And presently it came out that Florence, the spiritual, was arranging to be rid of a mole in front of her left ear and of certain menacing wrinkles, that Henrietta was worried about the deepening hollows in her cheeks, and was also trying to decide whether injections of paraffin would really improve the appearance of her rather scrawny hands and fill up the holes between the base of her neck and her collar bones.

"I *am* surprised, Florence!" exclaimed Sophy.

"I'd be satisfied to let myself alone," apologized

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Mrs. Berkeley, without, however, so much as a blush of embarrassment, "if it wasn't for the other women of my generation. I don't purpose to let them stay young while I get old. You'll have to come to it, Sophy. It's illy and it's vain, but we've got to do as others do or be belved."

"And you say the man claims to be able to remove wrinkles?" pursued Sophy, with the air of an incredulous but interested inquirer into a matter entirely new and unheard of. She had no wrinkles; she simply wished to bring the conversation back to the important subject. Inevitably, sooner or later, her own needs would be touched on, without her having to betray herself.

"He *does* it," Florence assured her. "Mrs. Whitney sent three women to him. I saw one of them—Mrs. Siddons, of Chicago. Do you know her?"

"No," said Sophy; "but I've heard of her, of course. Won't it be frightfully painful?"

"Indeed it will. But the pain lasts only a few days, and the new skin will last a year or two. Mrs. Whitney has hers done in Paris every two years, and look at her—over fifty, and not a wrinkle; cheeks and brow like a baby. This is the same process."

"Somehow, it seems to me not quite—moral," suggested Sophy. "It's like interfering with the plans of the Almighty."

"God didn't make the wrinkles," retorted Henrietta Hastings. "And now He has let us learn how to keep ourselves as He made us."

Sophy suspected Henrietta of levity, she being reputed a scoffer; still, was Scripture any the less Scripture, though quoted by the Devil himself? "When you come to think of it," said she, "it ain't right, is it, that

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good women should let bad women triumph over them. It's our duty to be as attractive as we can."

"Duty!" Henrietta made a wry face. "Why do you try to spoil every pleasure in life, Sophia," cried she, "by sliming it over with cant about duty?"

But Sophy was absorbed in contriving how to convince her fellow-townswomen that they were leading her into these vanities; for Sophy, thoroughly human, had her full share of humanity's fondness for evading responsibility. If the experiments turned out well, then she could accept the full credit; if, however, they should turn out badly, she wished to have some one to blame. "I can't get over my surprise," said she to Florence, of whose intellect and "culture" she had always been in awe. "It don't somehow seem a bit like you to take to this kind of thing."

Florence—tall and fair, a touch of haughtiness carefully cultivated with an eye to conveying the "grande-dame" impression—shrugged her shoulders. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, you seemed to me to care only for—for the things of the mind."

"But I have to live in a body, don't I? Naturally I want it to be sightly as long as possible. Besides people don't take nearly so much interest in you intellectually if you look tumble-down and gone to pieces."

Sophy was cowed by that "tumble-down and gone to pieces." It gave her the impression of her friend disdainfully flashing a mirror before her. "Florence means she likes to have the men about," put in Henrietta, "and she knows they come only when their eyes are pleased."

Sophy, to show that such ideas were utterly foreign

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to her, looked scandalized. But Florence was undisturbed. "I don't care about the men as men," said she. "I prefer them because they know and do, while women amount to nothing. Besides, women are so petty and sneaky with each other."

"The men are on earth chiefly to attract the women, but they don't know it," declared Henrietta. "The women are on earth chiefly to attract the men, and they do know it—though some of us pretend otherwise. Wherever people are really civilized you find both the men and the women giving a lot of attention to their bodies. We are only showing our intelligence, our appreciation of the advantages civilization offers us."

"I don't know as I'd exactly care to have *everybody* know what I was about," said Sophy, so simply and earnestly that the others laughed.

"Certainly not," said Henrietta. "I wouldn't let even my husband know." Whereupon both Mrs. Murdock and Mrs. Berkeley looked embarrassed.

As the two women had confided in Sophy, they were determined she should have the best of reasons for respecting their confidence. Accordingly, Sophy was able to pretend the extreme of reluctance, to deceive even herself, and finally to accompany Florence with the air and the feeling of one overborne and forced.

Florence's doctor was Secor, with the reputation of being able to reconstruct the human face and figure entirely, and almost deserving his reputation. Secor was about the first American doctor of standing to go into what is beginning to be spoken of respectfully as the esthetic branch of the profession. He was exceedingly proud of his marvelous skill, much irritated at the ignorance and barbarism that compelled him to practice it in stealth; but he was too conventional at heart, had too

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much regard for the social position of his family, to defy public opinion and the opinion of the less enlightened but more numerous members of his own profession. The preachers were especially irritating to him. "Why, madam," said he to Mrs. Murdock, "there was one preacher whose eyes I straightened and whose projecting thin ears I trimmed and set back against his empty head. Would you believe it, that scoundrel is now preaching against the wicked worldliness of those who seek to correct the mistakes of nature and lessen their handicap in the race of life!"

He, however, did not at heart blame the preachers. In the development of æsthetic hygiene, medicine, and surgery, he saw another evidence of the decay of the old religious faith which despised the body and exalted the soul, neglected this life and fastened wholly upon the life beyond the grave. "The soul having become problematic," said he, "men and women naturally begin again to give attention to the body. The hope of a future life having become hazy, they try to make the best possible out of the one they are sure of."

Mrs. Murdock was not shocked because she did not hear. It was her habit to stop listening whenever anyone talked what she regarded as profound matters. Who pleased might flounder about in the ocean of thought; for herself, she would stay on shore. Besides, her interest in Secor was concentrated upon what he could do for her body. Alone with him she abandoned all pretense of reluctance, and together they canvassed the situation frankly and minutely. With a clearness of expression and an intelligence and impartiality that would have astounded all who knew her, she pointed out to him just what she was and just what she would like to be. And Secor took deep interest; he was especially at-

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tracted by her slight vanity as to the charms she had—charms of eyes and complexion, of nose and most unusual hands and feet, which so many women would have regarded as in themselves quite sufficient. She seemed to him to substantiate his favorite theory, that a woman's vanity and her estimate of her physical value are great directly as her justification is small. His theory, based upon vast experience, is interesting, but probably erroneous. It may be, perhaps, nearer the truth to say that we are all as vain, regardless of basis for vanity, as the limits set by our sense of humor permits; and that the vanity in those wholly unjustified and usually aggressive because uneasy, merely seems greater, for the reason that it is so grotesque. Secor agreed with Sophy that the important defect in her face was its lower part. "Yes, that's really the whole cause of your look of maturity," said he. "You've no wrinkles to speak of. Your nose is excellent—excellent. I couldn't do better than nature has done for you in the matter of mouth. I suggest that you have the two gold fillings in your upper front teeth taken out and carefully matched porcelain substituted. Perhaps a little—just a little straightening of the teeth, but really they're very good."

"I'll have my teeth gone over thoroughly. I've got the address of a dentist who, they say, can do wonders."

"Bowker?"

"That's the name. Is he all right?"

"None better. About the contour." And he eyed Sophy's heavy cheeks and chin, laid hold of the superfluities, felt them, twisted and pinched them this way and that.

"Can't it be cut off somehow?" inquired Sophy,

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much pleased with effects of slender face he got—she was following his movements with the aid of a mirror. “You say you can heal cuts without a scar.”

“Certainly,” replied Secor. “I could operate. But it’s always wise to put off drastic measures. First, let’s see what comes of systematic massage, breathing, diet, and walking.”

Sophy sighed. No royal road to beauty! “I suppose I’ve got to come to it,” said she.

“All a question of habit,” Secor assured her. “In six months you’ll have no desire to go back. . . . Yes, I think the bosom’ll yield nicely to massage—properly directed. And the hips—in part. Breathing, dieting, and walking’ll do the rest. Of course I can’t make you a willowy creature. Your natural type is the sumptuous. It’s much admired, too.”

“I shouldn’t care to be thin,” replied she.

“We’ll get you a competent masseuse,” continued he, “one with firm, sure, well-padded fingers. And you must have your maid learn massage. Send her to me. I want to look at her hands.”

Secor had long since learned to discount the optimism of his female clients by being moderate, even pessimistic, of promise. In fact, he was confident—and the event justified his diagnosis—that Sophy needed no surgery, needed nothing beyond a chance for her superb constitution. She had done her best to destroy it; but she had not even shaken it, so firmly was it founded and built by those early years of work in house and garden and dairy, of climbing fences and trees and hills, of ranging freely in the open air all the year round. In heart, in lungs, in all the vital organs she was absolutely sound.

She got a letter from Norma, with news that in a

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few months she would be a grandmother. The word, the idea, at just that time, when her mind was all upon the things of youth, drew a smile even from her literalness. "A grandmother!" thought she. "White hair and caps and the corner of the fire. I don't feel a bit like that—and I'm not. Yet I suppose Norma would think I was a silly old fool. Well, maybe I am; but I'm going to be happy, and get all I can out of life."

The three friends and companions in æsthetic adventure, to be free from interruption and secure from observation, removed to a small private sanitarium of Doctor Secor's. The women who went there cut themselves off from friends and family and gave out that they were taking a "complete rest cure." It was in a dull, down-at-the-heel block, aside from the fashionable and frequented district and convenient to Secor's office. Mrs. Berkeley's treatment, temporarily frightfully disfiguring, forced her to stay indoors, venturing out only behind heavy veils and at night; so Mrs. Murdock went about with Henrietta, who was a great walker and an indefatigable shopper. It was Sophy's first experience of the very fashionable New York shops; indeed, it was her first experience of the New York that is a world-city. When she was last there, a dozen years before, it had been an overgrown provincial town, countrified, commonplace, without individuality. Now, its Titanic architecture, its vast reaches of prodigal luxury, its extravagance and excitement and laughing defiance of all she had been regarding as sacred and fine—of her religion, her morality, her ideals of every kind—awed her, stunned her, made a furious, envious anger, which she thought was righteous indignation, surge up within her. The feeling was formless, far beyond her vocabu-

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lary. She could express but a small part of it. Her outlet was the flaunting displays of women's apparel in the shop windows. These outraged her notions of modesty. "If this isn't stopped," cried she, "what chance will a respectable woman have? Why, it used to be that a man stood in awe of a woman's privacy. There was a refined, sacred mystery about her. But what mystery could there be for a man that walks these streets and looks in at these windows? He sees everything she's got—even the most private things."

"Nothing left for us," said Henrietta, "but to enter the competition with the other kind of women and try to be finer and more delicately perfumed and wear more lace and ribbons than they."

"Scandalous!"

"No more scandalous than the things the churches do to compete with the saloons for souls," sparred Henrietta. "The truth is, it's laziness and stinginess and lack of taste that makes respectable women denounce as devilish all the arts and graces. Now that just posing as virtuous isn't enough any more, now that they've got to compete with the women who have to be alluring or go to the wall, they'll be the better for it."

Henrietta was chagrined to observe that Sophy was not wincing, was not taking these home-thrusts home. "I suppose so," she answered absently. Her eyes lit upon a window bedecked with stockings and underclothes upon wax figures. "A woman oughtn't to let her husband come here and walk about," she said, with a toss and an angry compression of the lips.

"My Fred's safe at home. These show windows alone would put him in the way to being discontented—and worse."

Sophy was filled with sullen hatred of New York,

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with despair. What chance would she have, even though free, when there was such competition? Then, she remembered Juliet Raeburn, and her lip curled in scorn of Murdock. "With all these to pick and choose from," thought she, "he took up with her!" Certainly, there was no accounting for tastes. "Men are fools where women are concerned—plain fools." Well, after all, the competition was not hopeless for any woman. Blagden's compliments, carefully preserved like rare jewels, were here reëxamined; and her feeling of insignificance subsided.

As soon as the shopkeepers and clerks discovered who she was, her pendulum began to swing swift and far in the opposite direction. They paid servile court to her money; she thought it was to herself, and there opened merits in New York that mitigated its vicious defects. Saint X did not appreciate her, as did New York. And soon New York had firm hold upon her. She went from shop to shop in ecstasy. Everything she saw seemed beautiful, and she longed to buy it. Luxury, even the luxury she adopted, had always offended her old-fashioned frugality as foolish and sinful; now she began to feel that every costly thing had its uses, was put into the world by the Almighty to soften its hardships. Yes, she must make haste to take advantage of the blessings the Lord had created and had put within her reach. Her one remaining difficulty was selection. "I just can't decide," she cried. "Everything I see seems better than the last thing."

"Most of this stuff is trash," replied Henrietta. "It's got together to catch the eye at a glance. Make it a rule never to think of buying till you've seen everything, and never to open your purse till you've slept on your choice. Then, you'll find there's little you want,

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and that little mighty hard to find. Most women are no more fitted to be trusted with the shopping than a child with the range of a toy shop."

"I guess I'm one of those women," said Sophy.

And she threw herself upon Henrietta's superior experience and decision. She would not buy the smallest trifle without first consulting Henrietta; and, while Henrietta's taste was commonplace, it was at least not fantastic. "I don't seem able to get myself up as well as some of the women, the really smart-looking ones. But, thank goodness, I don't put on absurd or fussy or tawdry things." Nor did she buy anything for Sophy that was positively bad, and much of the new outfit was extremely becoming; the main point after all was to get Sophy broken of the habit of ordering dresses and hats of elderly types and accustomed to taking the sort of things she had thought fit only for Norma, almost too young even for Norma, now that she was married.

The great cities of the earth are so many alchemist's retorts into which are constantly pouring vast quantities of human raw materials, presently to emerge as finished products in infinite variety. Of these magic retorts New York is the greatest, because its receipts of raw humanity, domestic and foreign, are largest, and the wonders of transformations wrought in it by its powerful chemicals are the most marvelous. The Sophy who was deposited, fresh from Saint X and the mountains, at the Holland House, bore small resemblance to the Sophy who in a few brief, but busy weeks, greeted Blagden, coming to New York from Chicago on business for Murdock. And she thoroughly enjoyed the dazed expression which did not wear off even after an evening with her and Henrietta at the theater.

"I always did think her a fine type of woman, to

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look at and in character," he reflected, as he was driving away from the boarding house after they had had supper together at Sherry's—a supper at which Sophy resisted even lobster Newburg and a concoction of fresh peaches and ice cream that made her ache with longing. "But now she's right in it. A man could love her on slight provocation. And I don't see how he could possibly do better than marry her."

To Blagden, born with an aristocratic, worshipful mind, and bred in aristocratic adulation of wealth, this audacious soaring glance of a dizzy ambition seemed even less sane now than when he first dared to lift his eyes to the exalted golden height where his employer's family was ensconced. But even the most reckless ideas can become familiarized; man, the infinitely adaptable, can so train himself that with no more than a tremor he will cut loose from the solid earth in a balloon or promenade a chasm on a tight rope.

The two women, or, rather, Sophy, asked Blagden about the New York shops, as they wished to overlook none of the best class. He mentioned several of which Henrietta, who had been doing her shopping in Chicago the past four or five years, had never heard. Finally, he said: "Then, of course, Dangerfield, for hats and dresses and, I believe, fine underclothes. But no doubt you've been there."

"No," Henrietta was forced to confess. "I've often heard of it, but it quite slipped my mind. Sophy, we'll go to-morrow."

And go they did. As soon as they were before the Holland brick and marble building, Henrietta began to reproach herself, privately, for having been so stupid. "Sophy'll imagine I don't really know anything about

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New York," she thought. And a very humiliating thought it was to one who, while posing as an indifferent, had the provincial's infantile pride in her intimate knowledge of the metropolis. But she soon forgot herself in amazement before the new departure in shop-keeping.

"The prices will be something fierce," she murmured, with intent to lead Sophy to think that the reason for her glaring oversight. "The customers have to pay for all this gorgeousness. . . . Those flowers are real. They must cost a small fortune, every day."

They wandered up the grand staircase and into the main dressmaking salon. It was off season, and they had been having difficulty in getting anything at all because so many of the special shops were closed or emptied of their best for their seaside branches. But Dangerfield's, although almost deserted on that particular day, was ready for business—ready for, and getting, the big out-of-town trade, the rich people of the West and South who make New York City their summer resort. Not a fashionable crowd, but eager to become fashionable, and grateful for aid toward that goal, no matter how heavy the charge. Sophy continued to show that she was overawed; but Henrietta, as became a leader and guide, concealed her awe and bestirred herself first among the dresses, then among the hats, and finally in the new department, the showings of the most alluring and most expensive underclothing she had ever seen. Sophy followed, so bewildered by marble pillars and fountains and tapestries and Oriental carpets that she hardly saw what the salesgirls were exhibiting. Though she had been speedily cured of all feeling about the sinfulness of luxurious outer dress, she had until now retained the feeling that in simple and moderate under-

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clothing the upright woman showed her real quality; she might yield in other things, but there she must stand or be lost.

Henrietta had the same feeling, as an instinct; but she was ashamed of it and fought it. "Such things as these are waste of money," said she to Sophy. "Fred never looks at me, and no one else can." Still, Henrietta yielded to the extent of some stockings and chemises, several hundred dollars for a mere handful of those cobweblike goods.

When the stockings and chemises passed to the ownership of a respectable woman, Sophy Murdock looked at them with different eyes. "I must have some too," cried she. She bought, became intoxicated by possession, bought more and more, until Henrietta could not keep envy out of her handsome, if rather too sharp, features.

"One'd think you were buying your trousseau—or worse, Sophy," said she with a sarcastic laugh.

Sophy colored high. "They're so pretty," she pleaded.

"Yes, it will be a temptation to show them," retorted Henrietta.

Sophy burst into a profuse sweat of embarrassment. She abruptly ceased to buy, though the saleswoman tempted her more subtly than ever, looking daggers at the meddlesome Mrs. Hastings.

Details, such as these extravagant purchases of beautiful clothing to be worn where no man could see, are usually disdained by biographers of character. Yet it was on that day and at those displays of underclothing that the character of Sophy Murdock began its final and most radical change. Clad in those garments, beneath her new elegances of gown and hat and

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gloves, she had the courage to be herself, to dare to think the thoughts she had been all those years suppressing, to dare to send freely out from her heart into her blood the emotions she had been taught as a child to believe were "the natural sinfulness of the flesh."

When she accompanied Henrietta—or rather, when Henrietta accompanied her—to Dangerfield's again, a week later, there was a difference in her carriage, in the sparkle of her eye, in the tone of her voice; there was even a distinct new sprightliness and attempt at what Henrietta called "free and easy breadth" in her conversation. In this world, the psychologists to the contrary notwithstanding, there are far more souls living up to the character of the bodies they dwell in than there are bodies living up to the character of their tenant souls.

As they were walking in Fifth Avenue, Sophy stopped Henrietta at a window displaying a model bathroom for a palace—marble floor, walls, ceiling, marble pool, tub, footbath and stand, palms and white fur rugs, long mirrors, tables with astonishing arrays of toilet articles. "I'm going to have a room just like that put in my suite at home," said she.

Poor and rich are too remote for poor definitely and actively to envy rich. It was the real and hateful envy of not so rich for rich that made Henrietta's face ugly, even bestial for an instant.

"I mustn't forget to write down the names of those powders and perfumes, too," continued the unconscious Sophy. "But, then, Katy will know. I'm having her take a course in manicuring and hair dressing, in addition to the massage lessons."

Henrietta's eyes sparkled with pretended amuse-

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nt, with real suspicion. She could not trust herself speak. "And I thought Sophy was a settled man," she said to herself. "I might have known! He wouldn't be astir after all these years, except for use."

XXI

"A FRIGHTFUL MAN"

SOPHY had been at Dangerfield's for several fittings, both alone and with the others—for Mrs. Berkeley, without the mole, and with a skin as young and smooth as Norma Degarmo's, was going about in daylight again. On the morning before the departure for Saint X, she took Henrietta with her, when she went to make arrangements about the things that would not be done in time to go into the trunks. Florence would not accompany them. "It's only an irritation to see all those tempting things," said she. "Secor's bill is frightful, and I can't afford to buy clothes, Dangerfield clothes"—which meant that she had reached and strained the limit of Berkeley's domestic allowance.

Sophy was impatient to be home again. She was debating whether she should not herself stir up the matter of the divorce, if she did not soon hear from Murdock's lawyers; she was impatient to begin the new career opening before her the more brightly because vaguely—the career in which she would be a woman of fortune, and free and unencumbered.

Henrietta had drifted into the millinery department; she herself, through with the last fittings, was resting and discussing styles with the head saleswoman. There entered from the hall, with a footman bearing

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all parcels in her train, a woman whom she instantly
ided was the most beautifully dressed she had ever
n. She had on an early fall street dress of a delicate
de of tan, with an edge of creamy white showing
e and there; on her plumed hat, of the same shade
er dress, was a big white buckle that depended upon
shape and position for its effect of crowning to per-
tion a perfect costume. She was a slender woman,
figure seeming to be vividly alive everywhere with-
er garments. Her hands and feet were also very
der. She was carrying a big bunch of lilies of the
ey. Sophy could see only her profile—the profile
a pale, slender, exquisite face, high-bred, eager,
inine, yet curiously resolute.

"Who is that lady?" Sophy inquired.

The saleswoman turned just as the newcomer
nced in their direction. "Why, that's Miss Rae-
n," she cried. "She must be just back. She's been
y for a long rest. I'll bring her and introduce her
you."

Miss Raeburn! Sophy's head swam; unconscious
appearances, she craned her neck in her eagerness
see. Yes, this exquisite woman was none other than
wan, fagged, narrow-chested nurse, Miss Ray.
[o, no," she stammered, terror and command in her
e—for the girl was already started toward Miss
eburn. If Miss Raeburn recognized her, she gave
sign of it. She smiled and waved her flowers friend-
at the girl and passed on into an inner room.

"No, no," repeated Sophy hysterically. "I
en't got time."

"You'd have liked her," said the girl regret-
y. "We all adore her here. And she's not a bit
up."

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When Sophy could trust herself to speak, she asked, "Is she one of your customers?"

The girl laughed. "Dear me, no. She's Dangerfield's. She's the whole show."

Sophy rose, color high, eyes glittering. "I'll not wait for Mrs. Hastings," she said haughtily to the startled, astounded girl, and without another word swept from the room and from the house. Her emotions raged through her brain in a succession of cyclones. She felt she had been tricked and outraged in a dozen different ways. So *this* was the woman who had lured her husband away! Not a miserable, common nurse person, poor and meek and homely; but a brazen creature, beautiful after a fashion, though loud—especially loud in dress—and a woman engaged in a business from time immemorial as intimately associated with irregular living as the stage. "I'll never consent to it—*never!*" she cried, as the electric cab took her toward the Holland. "He and she *sha'n't* triumph over me! . . . I've no doubt she came back to him as soon as I and the children left. . . . And I've been spending money with *her!*—been giving her *thousands* of dollars! . . . No doubt he's backing her in that low, wasteful, wicked business. But I'll stop that! I'll stop her switching round as if she had a tail. I'll make such a scandal that he'll come crawling home, and we'll see how long this Dangerfield business lasts. Dangerfield!—why, it's money that belongs to his wife and family that's keeping it up. I ought to have denounced her right there. I ought to have torn those clothes of shame off her back."

It was the irony of fate that, when she got to the hotel—they had left the boarding house as soon as *Florence* was presentable—she found a note from her

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usband—a scrawl without beginning, and ending imply "Murdock"—saying that he would return to take her to lunch, as he had a matter of business to talk over with her. Her eyes blazed as she read and her face was aflame. "Yes, I'll talk *business* with him!" she muttered.

Two hours later she was not less angry and determined, but had her jealous rage under better control. She was even taking a certain cold pleasure in planning how she would lead him on and then suddenly rush him with a refusal to divorce and a proclamation of defiance. Henrietta and Florence came into the sitting room the three shared, just as the bell boy brought his card. She did not wait for the boy to depart. "My husband is lunching with me," she said to her two friends. "For some time he's been carrying on with a woman named Raeburn. I've just found out that she keeps Dangerfield's. He's been paying for her extravagances. But I'm going to stop it."

Mrs. Berkeley, shocked by the outburst, and amazed that quiet, rather shy Sophy should thus descend to making a public scandal, frowned the open-mouthed, open-eared bell boy from the room. Henrietta said eagerly, "This is the first I've heard of it. Dangerfield! Miss Raeburn! Are you *sure*, Sophy?"

Mrs. Berkeley, mindful that Mrs. Hastings was about as ardent and industrious a gossip as a quiet town ever bred, said entreatingly: "Please don't say any more, Sophy."

"Say?" cried Sophy. "Why, I want the whole world to know! I'll drag her down! I'll teach him to insult me and disgrace his children!" And she rushed toward the hall door.

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"Don't you think some one ought to be with you when you talk to him?" suggested Henrietta.

"Henrietta!" exclaimed Florence, horrified by this bold bid for the gratification of morbid curiosity and of cynical passion for mischief-making.

But Sophy, always easy to swerve and always eager for support, had paused. "You're right, dear." She turned to Florence. "You'll come with me, Florence?"

"No, Sophy. You and he should talk over your private affairs alone."

Sophy, abashed by the severity of Mrs. Berkeley's tone, glanced uncertainly at Henrietta. "If you want my opinion," said Henrietta, "no one woman is a match for such a man as he. Of course, if you wish to give in to him——"

"I do hope you'll see him alone," pleaded Florence. "He may have come seeking a reconciliation, and——"

"Reconciliation!" raged Sophy. "I'll have nothing to do with him. He has turned my love into hate. If it weren't for the wickedness of it, I'd divorce him. Come, Henrietta! Let's go to him."

Murdock was in the main parlor, walking slowly to and fro with a military regularity of step that gave him an air of inevitableness. The outdoor life he had been leading continuously since he got clear of doctors and nurses had put a deeper bronze upon his tawny skin, had brightened his eyes and hardened his flesh. As Mrs. Hastings looked at him, handsome, distinguished and young, she wondered at Sophy. "Still," she reflected, "there's no accounting for physical attractions and repulsions. I can understand why people think it queer I love Fred, with his big fat face and his great stomach. I think it's queer, myself."

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urther, she remembered she had often thought that, all his good looks and agreeable manners, she could never fancy Murdock. There are men whom all women love; there are women all men like. They are usually of conspicuous sex development and chameleon like adaptability. But the men and women of the Murdock sort, strongly individual, careless of their fellows, whom they would not conciliate through fear of enmities, indifferent to the opposite sex unless themselves attracted, yielding then with reluctance to a force that threatens their self-control—such men and women create, where they do not care to charm, an impression of coldness, often of apathy, of entire lack of charm. Murdock had seduced the clever, insincere, footless Henrietta years before, and had tossed her on that large private man rubbish heap which everyone of wide acquaintance accumulates. He saw her, frowned impatiently. His glance sped on to Sophy.

Like most married people, he was not in the habit of actually seeing his wife, as a rule, when he looked at her. In fact, he had trained himself, not wholly consciously, to see as little as his habitually observant eyes could see. But the alteration in her dress, in her face, in her figure, in her whole exterior personality was so marked that his attention was arrested. Not in many a year had she looked so well. She was still a large woman, but her body now seemed part of her, and no longer an ill-fitted, cumbersome envelope. Her face was in better proportion also; her dress and hat had distinction, and were of style and colors befitting her youth. He noted the change, in general and then in detail, with surprise, but without the smallest sense of personal interest. For him his married life was a finished episode, sealed and filed. It belonged to the

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past, not to the present; it was part of the career of a Charles Murdock who was as dead as yesterday. He extended his hand coldly to Mrs. Hastings, withdrew it the instant it had touched hers, stood smiling pleasantly at his wife. "How well you are looking!" said he. "I like that dress. You got it here?"

Sophy gave a contemptuous sneer. "From Dangerfield," she said, eyes fiercely upon him.

He felt what was coming, straightened, stiffened himself, effaced all expression from his face.

"From that Raeburn woman," she went on, loudly. "From the dressmaking establishment you are keeping up for her." She turned to Henrietta. "And he soon to be a grandfather!"

It was Murdock's first news of the venerable dignity Norma was about to confer upon him. But at the moment he had none of the pleasant thoughts that normally come in the train of such tidings. The word "grandfather" produced precisely the effect Sophy intended. It smote and staggered him with the very sight and odor of old age. It rang a knell in his ears, the dolorous funeral bell over youth. "My God!" he muttered, his features showing how profoundly he was moved; the two women, not unnaturally, thought him conscience-stricken.

"Shame on you! Shame on you!" declaimed Sophy, following up her fancied advantage.

There were several people near; they heard, looked listened for more. Henrietta put a monitory hand on her arm. "Let's go into the side parlor," she said. She glanced at Murdock. "Or, shall we go down to lunch?"

"We are not going to lunch," cried Sophy.

Mrs. Hastings drew her insistently toward the

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nearest of the small parlors. Murdock hesitated, followed them. "I wish to talk with my wife alone, Mrs. Hastings," he said.

"But I do not wish to talk to you alone," retorted Sophy. "You've disgraced your family, and I refuse to be silent any longer. Oh, I know what you've come for. Well, I tell you now that I'll live up to my marriage vows, as I always have done. I promised to remain your wife until death, and I will. I'll be no accomplice in adultery. And you and I grandparents!" In the sweep of outraged virtue she quite forgot her own attitude, up to two hours before, toward the venerable honors and duties of grandparentity.

Murdock's stern, steady gaze finally pierced her through the veil anger had drawn over her sight. "So much the greater reason for repairing our errors," said he, "and hastening to make the best of life."

Her eyes had sunk before his; but his words were fuel to her fury. And it did not burn the less fiercely because she, full of youthful projects and of desires for life in its heyday, could guess what was passing in his mind, could not but feel that her belief in her own persisting charms was discredited by his anxiety to be rid of her, to spend his summer in another's company. "I suppose," she sneered, "you and that Raeburn woman came to town together——"

"Stop," said Murdock quietly. "All that you say about her is false—on my honor, it is false."

"Your honor?" she taunted. "Your honor!"

"I beg you to leave us, Mrs. Hastings," said Murdock with icy politeness.

"She'll do nothing of the kind," cried Sophy. "I want Henrietta to hear me say what I'm going to say to you."

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Murdock rose. "I must be going," he said calmly.

"Unless you can tell the truth, I hope you will go," replied his wife. "I want to hear no more denials of the truth." He bowed and turned away. "Henrietta, all the time I was up there," she went on, "waiting and watching over him, when he was pretending to be dying, he had that woman with him—day and night."

Murdock wheeled upon them so abruptly that Henrietta shrank in alarm. His face had been like stone; it was now all fire and energy. "Is that true?" he demanded. "Was *she* there?"

Sophy laughed in derision. "Listen to that, Henrietta! I suppose she hasn't dared tell him I saw her."

But Murdock was not listening. He had instinctively half turned away to hide his expression, and was muttering: "So it *was* she. It *was* she!" And his glowing face was but a faint reflection of the emotion, surging, sparkling within him, like spring's delicious, delicious tide of life in all that lives or can live. He knew now he had not really believed she was there, even when he fancied he did. But here was his dream come true. She did indeed love him—even as he loved her. He had hoped, had believed it. Now, he knew! She loved him, for—"it was *she*!"

His wife caught the words. "Yes, it was she, it was she," she mocked. "And the whole world shall know it. You'll find out—both of you—what people think of such proceedings."

This threatened assault upon Juliet Raeburn instantly sobered him. "I tell you," replied he, "I did not know Miss Raeburn was one of the nurses. I had been told not, and I believed them. It seemed too improbable that she should be there. In the presence of Mrs. Hastings I wish to repulse every insinuation against

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Miss Raeburn's character." He turned to Henrietta. My son and I met Miss Raeburn in the northwest woods two years ago because her camp and ours happened to adjoin. How she came to be one of my nurses do not know. There is some simple, certainly harmless explanation. She may have happened to be on the wrecked train——"

"No doubt she was!" cried Sophy with a triumphant laugh.

Murdock flushed, ended with a calm frank, "Your good sense will tell you, Mrs. Hastings, that my wife is yielding to jealous and unwarranted imaginings."

"Do you deny you love her?" demanded Sophy. Do you deny she loves you?"

"We have already taken Miss Raeburn's name in too often in this conversation."

"Take her name in vain—*her* name! The name of a woman! Hear him, Henrietta!"

Murdock suddenly bent upon Henrietta a look of dark fury, of imperious command that drove her in confusion from the room. His wife was about to follow when he turned the same gaze on her. She shrank before

"You have goaded me too far, madam," he said with dangerous calm. "You have lied about me and about an innocent woman; you have made a scandal before strangers, before the most notorious gossip and tale-bearer out home. Very well. Now hear me. If you open your lips again to anyone about Miss Raeburn, and if you do not at once resume the proceedings for divorce, you will not get another penny. I will not even pay your outstanding bills. What am I to you but a checkbook? There never was a more blindly devoted husband until you deliberately alienated yourself from me. You have not been a wife but a drag; an indolent,

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shiftless— No, I am forgetting myself. For years our relations have been on a business basis only. Well, if you want money, you must bargain for it. You can have half of all I've got if you meet my terms. If you don't, not a cent! Your allowance stops with this month. That is all!"

He turned on his heel and strode away. In the outer parlor he met Henrietta. He paused before her; the calm fury of his gaze fascinated her. "Mrs. Hastings," he said, "you thrust yourself into my family affairs, and heard things you ought to have been ashamed to listen to. You evidently have no shame. I shall appeal to an emotion to which you will respond. If you repeat to a living soul anything you heard to-day, if you speak of Miss Raeburn or of my wife's affairs or of mine I shall hear of it. And I shall wipe out your fortune and reduce you to poverty. Do I make myself clear?"

Henrietta did not answer; she was gray to the lips, and shaking in the spasms of a violent nervous chill.

"Answer me!" he commanded. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," said she faintly, though her teeth clinched to keep them from chattering.

"Then—guard your tongue."

And he went, Henrietta's hypnotized eyes following him, in them a look of fear and of admiration. When she could no longer see him she drew a great breath and said to herself: "Any woman would be glad to have such a man as that trample on her. And Sophy has thrown him away! Fool! Selfish, ignorant, conceited fool!" She rejoined Sophy, who was sitting stupefied under the blow of Murdock's last words. "Poor dear!" she said soothingly. "He is a frightful man. Everybody will sympathize with you."

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Sophy's reply was a look of agony.

Murdock's threat struck such terror into Henrietta Hastings's soul that she did not go West by the train Sophy and Florence took, but changed her tickets to another route. And she never hinted even to Fred what she had seen and heard.

XXII

FOR NORMA'S SAKE

Mrs. MURDOCK and Mrs. Berkeley and their maids, all parading trophies of protracted and diligent metropolitan sojourn, descended from the express at Saint X. The station hack drivers, countrymen, flown from the lonesomeness of farm life and making a living in the way that in town comes handiest to the farm-bred, gaped in astonishment and delight. "Who'd think," said one high-hipped ex-farmer, a young man made prematurely decrepit of aspect and voice by hot bread and fried things three times a day for thirty years, "who'd think them two yander was Sophy Baker and my wife's second cousin Flora Warfield that used to go tearin' and rarin' licketty-split over the fields barefoot in calico slips?" Mrs. Murdock saw her aristocratic son-in-law just behind Mrs. Berkeley's advancing groom. She was surprised and flattered by this attention.

"I thought Norma oughtn't to come out," explained Degarmo, "and it did seem cheerless for you to arrive in this nasty drizzle with no one to welcome you."

"Is Norma ill?" said Sophy, whose mind had latterly been only for her own affairs.

"Oh, no — fine as a fiddle. Only — in circumstances——"

"Of course — naturally," the prospective grandmother hastened to say.

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"No," continued Joe, "she's as active as can be. She has been up at the Eyrie every day for a week, putting things to rights."

Joe was at once impressed by the great and gratifying improvement in his mother-in-law's appearance—her less heavy, less stolid face, her more shapely figure, her fashionable, youthful traveling dress and hat. But he also saw what he was looking for—the signs of secret anxiety weighing upon her. A genuine secret anxiety, as distinguished from our more or less theatrical emotions for the purpose of making ourselves interesting to ourselves and our fellow-beings, has to be intense indeed before we can no longer contrive to prevent it from showing itself outwardly. Sophy's look of care and worry was proof how deep Murdock had shot dread into her. Craft could not have suggested a more effective way of dealing with her. To kill any passion, it is only necessary to kindle another and stronger passion. Sophy's jealousy, her smarts and stings from wounded vanity, had been forgotten, swallowed up in fear for her material welfare—perforce the prime concern with all human beings, except in moments of impulse. In those weeks in New York she had learned of the treasures that open to golden keys; and no miser values wealth as do those who know and love what it will buy.

"Norma's suspicions weren't groundless," thought Joe, from whom Norma's pride had withheld all but a prudence-compelled hint of her family's troubles. "There's the devil to pay between them." On the way to the Eyrie he disclosed the real reason for his unwonted and even superfluous courtesy in meeting her, though she, never delving into motives and always accepting surface-seeming as reality, did not see it. Her newly energized vanity told her he had come because she

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was a person of such consequence; and she accepted this as she accepted for true the exclamations of ravished delight from milliners and dressmakers when she was trying on their wares. "You'll pardon me for speaking of it," began Joe, "but Norma has somehow got the notion that—that things are not going quite as smoothly as they might between you and her father."

"Yes, I wrote to her. I wanted her to know the rights of the way I've been treated."

Joe diplomatically concealed the anger roused in him by what he regarded as evidence of Sophy's utter selfishness; for it seemed to him the outermost limit of selfishness for a woman, knowing her own daughter was about to become a mother, deliberately to harrow her mind. "Please don't think Norma asked me to speak of it to you," said he. "She hasn't even spoken of your letter. But I feel—and no doubt you do, too—that she mustn't be worried. It's only four months away now."

Sophy welcomed her son-in-law's intrusion; he had opened the subject she most wished to discuss. "Yes," said she, "he is acting scandalously. I've done my best to keep it quiet, but he won't have it. No, I'm going to bring suit for divorce against him. Some women might be able to stand it. I can't. I'm not sure what the teachings of religion are, but I won't believe God would want me to continue this life of martyrdom." She was crying softly now. "I suppose there are those that envy me wealth and luxury. But it's just as I said to my maid this morning when she was doing my hair. 'Katy,' says I, 'I'd gladly change places with you.' And I meant it."

Joe, of a less credulous and more analytic generation, was not in the least moved by her tears. He regarded tears as simply a feminine weapon, and of a past

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era—antiquated and futile as fainting fits. His was merely the conventional tone for sympathy as he said: "You know how I feel about your unhappiness, mother. But can't you put off the—the scandal until after the baby is born? You must do it! The worry would—You know what the effect would be on as sensitive a child as Norma."

Sophy had by no means lost her longing for freedom; nor had her up-piled resentment against Murdock lessened. But she felt she would almost be willing to live again with him as his wife rather than give him license for the wicked joys he had planned for himself; and her jealousy was solidly backed up by her stubbornness. To release him to a life of happiness with another woman was bad enough; to release him under compulsion was unendurable. Now, Joe's interposition set hope to stirring—hope that she might use him and Norma's approaching confinement to relax, perhaps to break, Murdock's grip upon her destiny. But, as she had committed herself with Joe, had led him to believe it was she who was eagerly seeking divorce, she must advance cautiously. Her answer to his plea was a heavy sigh.

"Did you— In the letter, did you speak of the divorce?" inquired Joe.

"No," was Sophy's reassuring reply.

"Then she needn't—and mustn't—have a suspicion a divorce is coming. I debated whether to talk to you first or to—to Mr. Murdock. It seemed best to see you. Now that I've your consent, I'm going on to New York—without letting Norma know why—and I shall get Murdock to do his part. Thank you, mother dear." He pressed her hand feelingly between both his. "Thank you. You are so good, so self-sacrificing."

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Sophy, like most women with children, was used to being called, and to calling and thinking herself, self-sacrificing. But those who love that rôle never lose their pleasure in having it acclaimed. "I can't forget I'm a mother," said she, with the sincerity of convinced virtue. "You men never understand a mother's heart."

She was now seeing a way of escape clear before her—a chance to be free herself, and to substitute gall for sweetness in the freedom of this husband who had mistreated her so shamefully. Acting upon a hint in a newspaper account of a divorce case she had, just before leaving New York, engaged the Mulvihill Private Detective Agency to "shadow" Murdock. The first report on him had been most encouraging. Delay would give her detectives opportunity to explore thoroughly. Once she had proofs of his perfidy, of Juliet Raeburn's true character, not he but she would be arbiter of destiny. The longer she considered Joe's interposition the more patently providential it became. "Yes," she said to herself, "God is still in His Heaven. 'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not triumph.'" Then to Joe: "I'll do my part if you get a promise from him. You are right; Norma must have her mind easy at this time. If she's fretting and worrying it may make the child an idiot."

He had been haunted by many dark and dire possibilities of disaster to his and Norma's hopes through the scandal; this terror, the most hideous of all, was new. Suppose his wife were to die, and the child were to live, an idiot! "I think I'll go to New York this very evening," cried he, sweat beading his forehead. "My God, it is frightful!"

"Now, you've got some idea what I've suffered from

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him," said she. "For it's all my fault. Everybody here knows there never was a patienter wife or a more sacrificing mother than I've been."

Degarmo telegraphed Murdock, and they met at the University Club the next evening. He had not had time to change from traveling clothes; Murdock was not only in evening dress, but also in evening dress of a quality that impressed Joe, expert at such matters. In all those small details, so important in fashionable dress for men, Murdock was perfection, the best of London combined with the best of Paris. Joe was profoundly concerned about Norma, regarded his mission as an issue of life and death; yet, so sacred were appearances to him, he began with a rambling, confused apology for his tweeds. Murdock, never resigned in the presence of folly, and in those days extremely irritable, cut his son-in-law short with, "Did you come from Saint X to see me about your clothes?"

"No," said Joe, instantly responding to the curb. "I came about the divorce."

Murdock frowned imperiously.

"Don't imagine I'm impertinent enough to interfere in matters that don't concern me," Degarmo hastened to say. "But—have you thought of Norma? She is to become a mother within the next four months."

"Ah!" exclaimed Murdock. But his expression remained unreadable.

"She doesn't dream you and her mother are thinking of divorce. All she knows is there's trouble between you—estrangement. Murdock, I want to ask you——"

"I understand," said Murdock, in a tone that forbade him to finish.

"I put that same question to Mrs. Murdock——"

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Into Murdock's face and out again flitted a smile, satiric, contemptuous.

"And she says she's willing to wait if you are."

A long silence, Joe watching his face anxiously but in vain. He might as well have watched the dead-white expanse of his shirt front.

"The child might be an idiot. Norma might—might——"

"I understand," interjected Murdock.

Five minutes, ten minutes, passed—a quarter of an hour; and still there was no abatement of his will's struggle against deviating from any purpose it had fixed. His will was Murdock's master, and never had it turned aside because of consequences. The suggestion of deviating conjured forebodings of disaster; for he knew fate is only too eager to make playthings of those who yield in the smallest degree to its insidious temptations to swerve. And Degarmo was asking a delay of six months, perhaps a year; and when that period was ended, there would be some fresh equally imperative reason for further delay. Delay always breeds delay——

"Let us dine," he said.

"I can't until I have your answer."

"I will give you my answer to-morrow."

Degarmo, cowed and insignificant though he felt before Murdock, could scarcely refrain from bursting out in denunciation of such hardness of heart. He watched Murdock furtively, horror surging up in him. "He *is* a brute," he said to himself. "No wonder men fear him and obey him. So *this* is what 'success' makes of a man." And he exclaimed aloud: "My God, Murdock! Don't you realize your daughter is at stake?"

The eyes that turned upon Degarmo withered his

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hatred and horror. "You don't know what you're talking about," Murdock said, his cold, slow voice in strange contrast to his eyes. "There are other considerations besides Norma. I never give a decision in an important matter the same day." He rose from the sofa, threw away his cigarette. "Let us dine."

"But Murdock——"

"I wish to hear no more."

It was a silent dinner, and afterwards they went to Healey's, Murdock playing and winning heavily, Degarmo merely looking on, as when he married he made a resolution not to play again in a gambling house on the American side of the Atlantic. At breakfast next morning, each showed plainly that he had passed the time of life when a dash of cold water drives away the traces of lost sleep. Joe knew he was wrinkled and haggard; he saw that Murdock merely looked weary. But he consoled himself by noting the profuse sprinkle of gray in Murdock's thick, fair hair.

"When do you expect the child?" asked Murdock.

"In four months."

"In six months from now the proceedings will be resumed. You will hear no more of it until then."

"Thank you——"

Murdock dammed the impending flood with a look. Stronger even than Degarmo's sense of catastrophe averted, was his awe of the man before him—this slave of an inflexible will with its relentless purposes. "How can a monster and a man contrive to live in the same body, without either destroying the other?" thought Joe. And then he forgot all about it, and, for the time, about Norma, in observing the details of Murdock's dress—a strikingly good pattern of cheviot, cut in a new way, a strange silk scarf of a new pattern,

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and so on, and so on. Presently curiosity got the better of manners. "I say, old man," he asked, "where did you get that suit—and that tie—and that shirt?" And Murdock said to himself, "How is it possible for Joe the shallow fool about clothes and society, and Joe the decent and fond where Norma is concerned, to be parts of the same person?"

XXIII

MR. BLAGDEN BESTIRS HIMSELF

BENT only on insuring Norma's peace of mind, Joe reported his interview with Murdock to Sophy that she, like most drifters, a roseate optimist, decided the divorce was as good as abandoned. She ordered her lawyer, Graves, to discontinue the expensive service of the detective agency; and, at home again, and with no one behind her to push and encourage and applaud, and comfortably settled in the old rut of novels, fancy-work and three "square" meals she began to shed the ideas Blagden had sown and New York had watered, as the desert sheds heat and grows cold when the sun sets. Soon, about all that remained of the rigid beauty regimen was Katy's energetic massage twice a day; and she persisted in this, not because it was good for her, keeping the contour she had regained, and to a certain extent holding her flesh down, but because she liked the soothing sensation of Katy's dexterous fingers. Like most of us, Sophy was simply a creature of surroundings, passive, ready to advance if there were stimulus, equally ready to retrograde if there were not. Those who condemn her might profitably consider whether they owe their graces of person and character to their surroundings or to their own unaided efforts.

Presently she resumed the service of the Mulvihill

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Detective Bureau. "It's dreadfully dear," reasoned she, "but if he ever does make trouble I ought to be good and ready."

The universe's chain of causes and effects is never broken; no action is without a cause. Often, indeed usually, there are many motives for any human action; usually, there is one that is the impelling motive—and rarely is it the one ascribed either by others or by oneself. Prudence undoubtedly figured among Sophy's reasons for resuming the shadowing of her husband and Juliet Raeburn; but it was not the impelling reason. She began again because, after the excitement of New York, which makes a business of providing amusement for those incapable of amusing themselves, Saint X was dull and tedious. Sophy might have occupied herself with the preparations for her coming grandchild; but that called for exertion, more exertion even than looking after her own neglected person and household. The regular twice-a-week reports on Murdock and "that bad woman" were exciting in themselves, more exciting than the best play, cost her no effort, gave her subject for thought, for vague, vaporous, endless speculation such as purposeless people delight in. The private detective agency knows its feminine clients, sees to it that the reports they receive stimulate curiosity and create an appetite for more and more of the same food; the writing of artistic reports is the chief part of the task of the private detectives. Graves re-engaged the agency; and, warned by the discontinuance, it proceeded to make itself indispensable.

Twice a week she had before her two voluminous reports—a minute account of the movements of her husband, an even more minute account of Juliet Rae-

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burn. She was paying for but one "operative" to watch Murdock; two were required for Miss Raeburn, one a woman apparently in the employ of Dangerfield's in some capacity that gave her access to the wastebasket in Miss Raeburn's private office. All three operatives, with a persistence that might have raised a suspicion of collusion and fraud in a less unsophisticated mind, agreed in pointing toward a connecting mystery in the ostentatiously separate lives of Murdock and Juliet Raeburn. Each operative in turn was just about to solve this mystery; thus, their reports gave her powerful doses of that delightful stimulant of suspended sensational interest which makes the story-paper serial so welcome wherever it goes. Sophy felt she knew what this mystery was—where "M." and "Miss R." were when each, about the same hour on the same day or evening, succeeded in throwing her detectives off the scent. "And they'll catch them, sure!" she exclaimed, eyes flashing in anticipation of triumph. What stronger moral confirmation of their intrigue could she have had than those reports from two, practically three, independent sources, showing simultaneous desire to hide? "And I'll soon get the legal proof. Then—let him look out! I'll bring him to his knees and drive her out of New York." It was one of her dreams, as she sat with her fancywork, to stand in front of Dangerfield's and see it dismantled and to let.

Murdock's monthly deposit to her credit had always been liberal. In the days before the open estrangement, he had often suggested increasing it, and she had refused. When all he had was freely at her command, in the old, easy-going American fashion, why trouble herself with money she did not need? Immediately after the open breach, he of his own motion

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doubled the monthly allowance. Not until the heavy charges for detectives began did she give the money relations between him and her a conscious thought. Then, however, step by step, she moved—or rather was moved—into the point of view where she regarded herself as unjustly placed by him in the position of pensioner upon his niggard bounty. “This is my reward,” said she to herself bitterly, “for not having been a wheedler and a grabber like other wives of men of means.” She observed that several of her friends among the married women were rich in their own right. “Florence Berkeley, for instance, could live well on the income of what she could realize from her jewelry—not to speak of that big block of stores and flats they say he has just settled on her. But what have I got? Nothing! What has he given me? Only a little jewelry—hardly enough to keep me five years, except in the poorest, stingiest way. I ought to have had more sense.”

But immediately she was transferring the blame to him. “He wouldn’t have waited for me to ask for things if he had been really decent. He has taken advantage of my easy, good-natured ways. That’s been the whole trouble—my unsuspicious nature. I never dreamed what a heart he had. No wonder he was always so secretive and distant.” Nor was her condemnation of him mitigated by reflecting on the reason she did not now ask an increase of the allowance—her fear lest he somehow should discover her guilty secret.

And he would have discovered it but for Blagden.

One afternoon Blagden, in Murdock’s outer office downtown in New York, saw before him a stocky dissipated-looking man, with greasy, kinky gray hair, drooping iron-gray mustache. He had the shady, fur-

MR. *BLAGDEN* *BESTIRS* *HIMSELF*

tive-brazen air of those who live by divers gainful occupations not yet recognized as legitimate, rapidly though we have been extending the mantle of respectability over all who live well without work—withdrawing it as rapidly from the mutton heads who still adhere to the slow and painful and comparatively unremunerative methods of honest toil. “My name is Mr. Noonan,” said the greasy-gray furtive man, producing an enormous seedy pocketbook bulging with thumbled and frayed papers. From it he extracted a printed card which he handed to Blagden.

“Thomas K. Noonan,” Blagden read. “With the Fidelity Detective Agency.” Blagden lifted his eyes from the card to the hard, corrugated countenance. “Well?” said he, concentrating an insultingly suspicious look upon Mr. Noonan’s spongy, brick-red nose.

“I want to see the boss on very particular business.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t deal with understrappers. Tell him I’ve come about his being shadowed.”

Blagden went through the several offices between the outer room and the place where Murdock was secluded in solitary quiet. Murdock listened indifferently. “I care nothing about it,” said he. “I’ll not see him. Let him talk to you or get out, as he pleases.”

When Blagden returned with this message, Noonan accepted it as the expected. “Go tell him,” said he, “that both he and the lady are being surveilled for a third party, and that I can put him wise.”

Blagden dropped his gaze to conceal suddenly flaming interest. “I’ll see,” he said, and disappeared in the direction of Murdock. But after waiting a moment or so out of sight of the detective he returned.

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His color was high, and he did not meet Noonan's hard bright eyes as he said: "He won't see you. But, as I explained to you, I have charge of his private affairs. He has no secrets from me."

Noonan eyed him for some time in silence. "Is there a place where we can talk private?" he asked at length.

Like all the adepts in the mysteries of high finance, Murdock had attached to his offices a series of small withdrawing rooms, "sweat boxes" as they are called, with exits in various directions, so that there might be every sort of comings and goings without attracting any more public attention than the stealthy movements of criminals in and out of their dens. Blagden led Noonan into one of these sweat boxes, and closed the door. They sat; so small was the room that their knees touched, and the air was instantly heavy with the fumes of stale tobacco and whisky from the saturated person of the detective.

"An old kick of mine—beg pardon—side partner, who drinks a bit too much at times—" he began.

"You mean," interrupted Blagden, "that your agency and another are the same under different names, that you play into each other's hands, that somebody has hired the other agency to shadow Mr. Murdock, and you've come to get a 'rake-off' from him."

Noonan grinned. "Not at all," said he. "But one agency can see to it that the other gets throwed off the track."

"What track?"

Noonan winked and nudged Blagden's knee with his.

"What track?" repeated Blagden, drawing his knees out of reach.

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Noonan looked significantly at the secretary, elevated his hand, rubbed its thumb over its first and second fingers.

"Not a cent," said Blagden, rising. "If you've got anything of value to us, you know you'll be paid. But we don't pay until we inspect the goods."

Noonan nodded appreciation. "All right—sit down," said he. "His wife is shadowing him and—the lady."

"What lady?"

"Miss Raeburn, of course."

There was a conscious pallor in Blagden's cheeks, a shiftiness in his eyes, as he said curtly: "Let 'em go ahead. We care nothing about it. Good day." And he held open the door of the sweat box that gave into a dark, narrow passage and thence into the main hall.

"I'm giving it to you straight," urged Noonan. "And your boss can rely on us. My principals always play square with the side that's got the most money."

"It's of no interest to us," said Blagden. "We thought it was another matter. Good day." And Noonan lingeringly edged into the passage, Blagden closing the door upon his heels.

As Murdock and Blagden were dining together that evening Murdock happened to remember the visit of the detective and vaguely wondered what the man had wanted. He recalled Tom Berkeley's story up in the woods about Florence and her detectives. It was unlikely that Sophy had had either the "gumption" or the "get up" to employ detectives; but if she had, she could learn nothing harmful to Juliet. Even as Berkeley was telling him he had made up his mind to let no temptation lure him to the folly and the in-

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justice of compromising her in any way. And when he found out that it was she who had shielded him from death and snatched him back to life, he fought down the longing to go to her. More than ever it was her right that her reputation be not put in danger of smirch through him. He had tried writing to her. But the results sounded labored, stilted, either too formal or too florid, and he gave that over. It was best to wait. He was daily strengthened in this resolution, so difficult for his temperament, by reading or hearing of scandals, catastrophes precipitated by just such impatience and recklessness as were urging him. The woman who had beaten off death from him when he lay helpless would wait for him; why risk anything, perhaps everything, simply to gratify a longing that would not be appeased, but the reverse, by yielding?

It was with no uneasiness of mind and with only the mildest curiosity that he said to Blagden, "By the way, did you find out what that detective wanted?" As he did not look up from his plate, he did not note how suddenly rosy the always ruddy secretary grew.

"He didn't say," replied Blagden, offhandedly. "Guess it was simply a play for a job. His smell still hung in my clothes when I took them off to dress for dinner."

In the woods Blagden's treachery to his employer, whom he sometimes liked, sometimes hated, always envied and copied, had been by the veiled routes of innuendo and implication. This was the first overt act, the first lie direct and face to face. He was getting on, was Blagden—was educating his mind to be expert and his conscience to be placid when the severer strains upon both should come, as his programme of chicane unfolded. "Murdock really didn't want to be an-

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noyed," he said to himself, composing his conscience for sleep that night. "He's doing nothing that could get him into trouble. Why, he won't even dine or take supper with Berkeley if there are to be any women. Then, too, it was my duty as a decent man to protect that noble wife of his—at any cost."

XXIV

AND MAKES RAPID PROGRESS

Two months, to the day, after Murdock got Joe Degarmo's telegram announcing the auspicious arrival of Joseph Degarmo second, he said to Blagden, when they had finished the morning's routine of business:

"Please take the afternoon express for Saint X. See Mrs. Murdock—alone. Say to her, 'The time is up.'"

If Murdock had been looking at his secretary, he would have been forced to wonder why his countenance suddenly lighted, why this curt and mysterious message not only was understood, but also was hailed with a delight so keen that it could not be concealed. After a moment's silent waiting Blagden asked, "Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I am to simply say, 'The time is up'?"

"Yes."

Blagden looked at his chief. Murdock was sitting in the peculiar, motionless, rigid attitude he sometimes took, an attitude that suggested one waiting for the shock of the assault, ready to receive it, certain to repel it. He seemed almost a youth at the first glance; yet there was in him—Blagden sometimes thought it was in the eyes, again in the chin, again in the bulge of brow, or perhaps the set of the head upon the shoulders

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—a fixedness, a concentration that was at the opposite extreme from youth's reckless, aimless prodigality of time and strength. To-day that expression terrified the secretary as it had terrified Joe Degarmo. "If he should ever find me in his path!" he muttered. A feeling of chill started somewhere away down in the center of his body, slowly spread, grew intenser, until he was cold from vitals to skin, was shaking so violently that he was afraid Murdock would see his jaws chattering.

At the Eyrie he found neglect bordering on desolation. The hedges were unclipped and dust-stained. Lawns, gardens, walks, and drives looked worse for slovenly attention than if they had had no attention at all. Within the house, disorder and dust. "Poor woman!" thought Blagden. "She has no heart for anything." And his own heart grew heavy with the sympathetic sorrow we can so readily summon for those whose lives touch ours only casually and whose weaknesses and shortcomings inconvenience us not at all. He was prepared to see a very Lady of Woe; he was, therefore, moved to admiration by the bravery of soul shown in the placid exterior presently appearing at the drawing-room door. Sophy looked somewhat better than she had formerly at Saint X, even at her best "company best," but not nearly so well as during her stay in New York. The warmth of her greeting thrilled him. The truth was, in her mind he had gone the way of the ideas and impulses he stimulated; he had grown hazy to her, for people of impulse without persistence soon lose distinct memory of whoever and whatever is not immediately before them. But now that he was again before her all that had been came flooding back; and she honestly felt that she was speaking the truth as she said with her sweet, whole-

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souled smile: "I think so often how good and kind you were to me during those trying days up there. Is—is Mr. Murdock coming?"

"No," replied Blagden. "He sent me with a message to you."

Mrs. Murdock shrank.

"A message you'll be very glad to get," he went on. They were in her sitting room. He rose and closed the door into the hall. "I remembered our talks together, and when he said, 'Tell her the time is up,' I knew I was carrying you your freedom."

"Yes," said Sophy faintly. And only that day she had been thinking she would hear no more of his attempt to marry again, had been thinking he must be tiring of his dressmaker— "No man ever respects a woman who gives up to him that way, and a man doesn't make a wife of a woman he doesn't respect." Having no fixity of purpose within herself for comparison, she not only did not understand it in another, but did not believe in its existence.

Blagden saw that, for some reason or other, his news was the reverse of welcome, that it had overwhelmed her. But it was his cue to ignore this, to continue to assume she was impatiently longing for freedom. "A few months more, that will quickly pass, and your troubles will all be over," said he encouragingly. "Perhaps I shouldn't say so, occupying the position I do, but I have thought every day of the heavy burden you were carrying, and my heart has ached for you."

Sophy's eyes filled with tears. "It's a wonder it doesn't age me," cried she. A year before, she would have wailed that it had aged her.

"If anything, you look younger than when I last saw you," said Blagden, full as much genuineness as flat-

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ry in the admiring glance he boldly gave. The flowing negligee flung a friendly grace over her too loosely ordered form, was most kind to her real charms—her satin-smooth fair skin, her shapely head, her glorious eyes. And, though she had been neglecting Secor's prescription for the contour, the former heaviness of the lower part of the face had not yet returned. Besides, she was neater, had not abandoned the habit of bathing before dressing, and of regularly washing the hair; and here were the eyes, the incomparable nose, those beautiful, luxury-loving, luxury-suggesting hands. Blagden had no need to strain his imagination; and while the amplitude of her person might have offended his acquired taste, had he indulged his critical faculties, it appealed to and stimulated an emotion far stronger than taste imposed by fashion.

Before his worshipful incense Sophy revived, expanded in soul, felt the yearning to confide and to lean. "I trust you," said she. "You are the only one I do trust. In New York last fall when—that is, when he thought I wasn't as eager for the divorce as I had been— You know, Mr. Blagden, I have religious scruples that I'm finding it hard to conquer—then, too, perhaps he only said it to frighten me from the divorce—" Sophy was red, was stammering, as she poured out these confused sentences, for she was not experienced in willful misstatement of the truth— "Anyhow, you can't imagine the brutality of his treatment. He said if I didn't get the divorce, he would impoverish me—stop my income."

Blagden started up indignantly. "Incredible!" he exclaimed, eagerly seizing the opportunity to put his conduct in a better light with himself. "Why, you've as much right to the fortune as he has! Without you,

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where would he have been? . . . Pardon me for saying these things—they seem disloyal. But I am human.”

Sophy pressed his arm gratefully. “Thank you,” said she, all in a glow at finding some one who had fathomed the obscured but essential truth of her importance as a factor in the making of Murdock’s career. “You are not disloyal. You are simply an honest man. But his threat worried me. I consulted a lawyer—not the lawyer he imposed on me, that Bailby, but dear old Mr. Graves, our family lawyer—up home, where I come from originally. And he assured me I need have no fears.”

“I suspect Mr. Graves, being old-fashioned, doesn’t appreciate the power nowadays of such men as Mr. Murdock,” replied Blagden, looking grave. “If he wished to do such a dastardly thing, he could do it. Mind you, I say, ‘if he wished to do it.’”

“I can’t believe it! There is such a thing as justice!”

Blagden shook his head sadly. “Not for ordinary mortals, against such men as Mr. Murdock.”

“I’m sure Mr. Graves would not mislead me,” cried she, irritated against Blagden.

He had rather anticipated the fate of the bearer of bad news to unreasonable, capricious woman, and was prepared to resist and insist. He put apologetic gentleness into his manner and voice, but not into his words. “Granting that the courts would allow you something . . . and that you could collect it . . . making the fight each time all over again . . . still, how much would it be? Why, at most hardly enough to keep up a place like this. You’d have to cut down your expenditures, and everybody would know about your changed condition. And you’d still be his dependent.”

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Sophy was listening, sour but attentive. "I'm so glad I talked of this to you," said she, in the tone in which one doles out reluctant justice.

"You see, your best interest is where your inclination leads," he went on. "If you pursue your original plan, you will be free, you will be independent, you will have a fortune. You will have power—happiness—everything!"

"But—" began Sophy. And there she stopped. How tell him she did not wish to enable "that woman" to triumph, yet not give him the impression of a vulgar, carnal jealousy? "The only thing that makes me hesitate," said she, feeling her way, "is—aside from the scandal—and my religion— *That* is a very deep feeling with me, Mr. Blagden."

"I appreciate that," murmured Blagden. He thought religion a fine trait in a woman, like many other virtues which he regarded as ridiculous, not to say impotent, in a man.

"I was brought up to believe—and I do believe!" Sophy uttered this as defiantly as if it were being vigorously disputed. "Without a higher power sustaining me, I don't know what would have become of me. But, as I was saying—and it grows out of my religious feeling, too—I sometimes feel it isn't right for me to release him, and let him perhaps marry that bad woman."

"Why should you think he'd marry her?" said he. Then, with an intonation for which he despised himself, he added, "Why should he?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Sophy.

"When he is free and doesn't marry her, you will have put on her the greatest humiliation possible."

Sophy was delighted; she had not thought of this. "If I could be sure he wouldn't!"

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Blagden smiled meaningly. "I can assure you I won't." He pretended to hesitate before saying, "I know he's not been seeing—*her* these last few months."

"Oh, yes, he has," cried Sophy. She halted, decided for giving him her whole confidence. "I have means of knowing. I engaged detectives." Defiantly, "I know it sounds badly, but I simply had to protect myself."

"Naturally," said Blagden, with the utmost heartiness. "Did your detectives tell you he was seeing her?"

"Not exactly, but practically. I had them both watched, and they'd both disappear at about the same time."

"That does look like it," admitted Blagden. "But—You mustn't ask me any questions about what I'm going to say. Mrs. Murdock, I *know* where *he* was at some many—of those times."

She winced, flushed. Then it came to her, making her radiant, that through these other women her triumph over Juliet Raeburn had already begun. Also, while the wife who is discarded for *a* woman is pitied and scorned, she who is discarded for *women* is congratulated on being well rid of a beast. "So! There are other women?" inquired she.

Blagden glanced away. "I did not say so."

"And that's why you say he won't marry her."

Blagden made no reply.

Sophy reflected long. Thanks to his impulsive hints and sensible advice, her right course lay clear and easy before her. After all, freedom with wealth that was her very own would be best; and how could morality demand that she remain linked to a loose, a promiscuous character? Why, decency forbade it. "Sooner or later, if I remain his wife," she reflected, "he'll be exposed in some low, dreadful scandal. Yes, I must clear my skirts

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him. I've done my best. 'He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.' And he won't marry *her*—never! He's not that big a fool—to give her a wife's power over his pocketbook. No, he'll keep her where he can hold the bit on her—if he doesn't get tired and throw her over entirely. Probably he's trying to get rid of her, even now."

Blagden did not interrupt her reflections; he read her face how favorable to his plans they were. Instead, he went to the window and pretended to inspect the view. When he did speak, it was to say, "I am going to resign from Mr. Murdock's service."

"Oh, no—not on my account," protested Sophy, in alarm, feeling that if he left she would have lost her stay. "I understand how it is. I don't blame you not in the least. *You* must make your career."

"I've not been staying on with him for that reason. I've done it simply for the experience. You see, my relatives haven't at all fancied my being in such a position. They've got a kind of foolish pride. They seem to think nothing is due them simply because they've lived in New York always and been at the front socially. I don't care for that sort of thing myself, but they want me to live on my little private income and make a social career. You know, my uncles and aunts are— But what's the use of talking that nonsense? As I was about to say, I've had enough experience of finance, and— Well, Mrs. Murdock, I'd have resigned long ago if it hadn't been—" He paused, reddened ingenuously, blurted out— "Well—I thought I might be able to help *you* stay on."

He put into tone and manner what he would not have dared put into the words—a discreet but distinct avowal of love—the worshipful love of moth for star—the

chivalrous devotion of knight for lady whom it is joy enough just to serve, without expectation or hope of reward.

Conventionality and morality protested in vain; it is not in human nature to be profoundly shocked, or not to be flattered, by a respectful avowal of love. The pink stole into Sophy's cheeks, and her handsome eyes became handsomer than ever. "You *have* helped me," she said in about the sweetest tones of that sweet soft voice of hers. "You have, indeed."

"That is all I ask," replied he humbly. "I am more than repaid."

Until now she had thought little, and that vague, of his high social position, of the fashionable family to which he belonged. He had been too easy, too natural, too comfortable to get along with; an entirely different person from her ideal of the socially grand people of the Eastern "smart set." All at once he seemed a sort of prince in disguise, one who had descended from his royal heritage to be near her, to serve her, to worship her in silence and humility. She had never especially noted his appearance beyond the fact that he was a nice-looking man; now she saw how well-dressed he was, what well-kept hands he had, the evenness and whiteness of his teeth. She remembered that he did not smoke—she detested the odor of tobacco, thought its use a filthy habit. She hadn't especially liked his red hair; she now observed what a fine, gentlemanly skin went with that hair, and the hair itself seemed more golden than red. Her brave knight was emerging from his disguise, full panoplied in all the charms a knight must have.

"But," she went on, blushing and uncertain of voice, "if you resign, I'll not see you any more, and I do need your advice. Who can I turn to?"

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He glanced meaningly at her, glanced away. "I shall be free," said he. "As it is now, I can't help feeling like a sort of traitor whenever I tell you what's in my mind. You can always count on me—" Again he looked at her, lowered his eyes, flushed, stammered, "Always—always, my dear friend."

"I'll not forget," she assured him, suddenly nervous and shy, in a way she had not known since girlhood. And he, seeing it and realizing he could not advance himself further by lingering, took leave. They both rushed violently as their hands met in a lingering clasp; and both had that glow of elation which is only the warmer for its slight sting of guilt.

XXV

BUT CHARLEY INTERVENES

LAWYER BAILBY, on a hint from Murdock's personal counsel Wickham, waited upon Sophy "to pay my respects, Mrs. Murdock, and to let you know that if your case is to go upon the present-term calendar, my client, Mrs. Murdock, it should be prepared at once."

Bailby was a rotund, rugged-looking person, in black clothes, a devotee of the fair sex, with a sympathetic quiver in his voice and a merry eye that was instantly ready to shed the quick tear of the tender heart. In the first few moments of their interview Sophy was upset and confused, sullenly suspicious of this lawyer who had been practically thrust upon her, uncertain whether she was glad or sorry at his mission. But when two such temperaments come together, suspicion and embarrassment cannot long endure. Soon Sophy, trusting herself really to credit double-dealing in any man being, was speedily unfolding herself, luxuriating in the story of her husband's coldness and neglect. As Bailby, had he been a bad man—which he was not—must have pledged his lance to one who was in his eyes such a "superb figure of a young woman," whether he believed her right or wrong. Being a man of sentiment and having the keenest appreciation how the most dreadful wounds can be made in a sensitive feminine soul by words and acts that might seem trivial to the ordin-

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coarse male, Bailby was all tenderness and encouragement.

"No man, dear madam," said he, his prominent blue eyes swimming, "no man is good enough for a good woman."

"That's true, Mr. Bailby," assented Sophy. "Men are so coarse."

"Coarse—that's the very word. And woman's nature is so fine, so different from ours."

"You ought to marry, Mr. Bailby."

"I've never had the courage, ma'am. I've always been afraid of what'd happen when Mrs. B. found me out. I've seen so much of married unhappiness. Your case is very sad. I can appreciate how your heart has ached and bled. I know I'm a man; but I had a mother—and a father. But, as I was saying, your case, hard though it is, dear madam, is no exception. Oh, the sufferings of women!"

Sophy heaved a deep sigh. "I don't want Mr. Murdock to be made out a monster, you understand."

Bailby raised his fat brown hand soothingly. "Certainly not—certainly not."

"He's not that, you know."

"I understand—I understand. Just a man. And you a woman unusually tender and delicate."

"I never *say* anything," said Sophy. "But—I feel."

Bailby shook his head mournfully. "I'll prepare the papers so you'll only have to write your name. You'll have no trouble whatever. We'll see to it that your feelings are spared in every way."

They parted warm friends, Sophy almost in an ecstasy of exalted martyrdom. He had so whetted her appetite for *unbosoming*, had so loosened up her mind

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on the subject of her sorrows that she straightway sat down and addressed herself to the composition of a letter to Charley, in prep. school in Massachusetts. As she was more fluent with tongue than with pen she would have preferred to seek out Norma. But in those days Joe was guarding Norma and the new-born with a vigilance that distrusted everything and everybody. Also there was naturally a stronger bond of sympathy between mother and son. Then, too, women never do appreciate women; for real, heart-whole, generous sympathy that questions not, the sex line must be crossed. She covered many sheets of paper with reproaches of Murdock and lamentations over the ruined home in her small neat handwriting. With Sophy grief was of the ordinary human variety. Its tongue did not cleave to the roof of the mouth, neither was its writing arm paralyzed.

"And even yet," wrote she, to clinch her own and Charley's conviction of the sincerity of her sorrow, "even yet, I do believe—I'm so *weak* and *forgiving*—I do believe I'd try to forgive him if he'd stop wasting money that ought to be his children's some day, on that New York *dressmaker* and *flaunting* his shame so that we are all *bowed* in the dust. I pray for him night and morning. I can't forget that he's the father of my boy and my girl. And *this* is my reward for letting *that woman* stay on up there, just through my soft-heartedness. I don't regret doing it, but I should think they'd be ashamed. I suppose they're so sunk in *sin* that they have no shame."

It was as she was writing that this last grievance came to her. Theretofore it had not occurred to her that she had done a generous act in letting Juliet stay on; she had simply done it, without thinking much about the whys and wherefores. And she forgot this additional

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aspect of it as soon as she had dispatched the letter; in fact, she all but dismissed her woes, so absorbed was her attention in the matters of self-improvement that now interested her more than anything else in the world.

Since the Adirondacks, Charley had been taking a much calmer view of the family troubles. The divorce seemed the remotest of possibilities, highly improbable; so he was able to look at such things more judicially. In that fashionable school there were no less than eight boys whose parents had divorced, and three of them luxuriated in two sets of mothers and fathers, all liberal and of the best social position. Now that divorce had ceased to be confined to the common people, had become fashionable, it might be well for a man of the world, a member of the senior class at the famous Glaston Academy, to keep his mind open on the subject. It certainly did seem more sensible for two who didn't get on to agree to let each other alone; and since the Almighty had so created people that a man needed a woman about and a woman a man, what more natural than remarriage? "And wouldn't it really be more moral for father to free himself and remarry than presently to blossom out into a middle-aged or elderly cut-up like the Tom Berkeley sort of men? . . . There's a lot of rot talked about divorce—but then, there's a lot of rot talked about a lot of things."

But when his mother's letter came Charley switched round. "A dressmaker!" he cried; for upon that emphasized word his attention caught and hung. In those cultured Eastern surroundings the young Westerner was absorbing the culture of snobbishness with a rapidity that bade fair to put him soon in the class with the boys from Boston and New York. "A dressmaker!" This

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was frightful—nothing fashionable—nothing romantic, therefore. A common, disgusting affair that would disgrace him with the boys, would cost him his as yet none too secure social position. “A dressmaker!” For the moment Charley thrust aside the impression Juliet had made upon him in the North woods; and that was not difficult for him to do, now he had got a less provincial, more cultured insight into life, had grasped the great truth that rank makes the man, not man the rank. Juliet Raeburn was a dressmaker, hence a common person, no matter what she might seem to be.

A ray of light shot into the gloom. “No doubt mother’s right. No doubt he’ll not marry her. No, he couldn’t think of such a thing. He wouldn’t drag us down that low. Why, I’d have to leave school. I’d never dare show up among decent people.” Again the clouds closed in; for a vision of Juliet Raeburn flashed upon him— “She ain’t that kind! Mother’s dead wrong. He’ll have to marry her to get her. Of course she’s not exactly a lady now, as she has to work for a living; but she’s a lady by birth and breeding.” So potently was Juliet’s spell reasserting itself that his head began to fill with excusing, disloyal thoughts. “I mustn’t forget my position as head of the family,” he hastily rebuked himself. “Mother looks to me to stop this thing, and I must do it.”

Charley always put off thinking until he had acted. He telegraphed his father that he wished to see him on very important business, and must have permission to leave Glaston and come to New York. The answer he wished came promptly and he set out. He tried to evolve a plan of campaign on the train; but somehow the clatter of the wheels or the people or something wouldn’t permit his mind to dispatch the problem as

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he had assumed it would. He decided it was best to trust to the inspiration of the moment. "I'll lead him up to the question—then he'll say something—and then I'll open out on him." It might look rather dubious and hazy at a distance; but as soon as he was face to face with his father it would doubtless instantly clear.

On the way to the Gotham from the station he began to have qualms which he could hardly keep from classifying themselves as fear. However, arrived at his father's apartment he marched in, head high, shoulders erect, face haughty. He had arrayed his person to his great satisfaction in the noisiest of patterns made in the extreme of the latest style. Murdock, at the fireplace with his hands behind his back, received him with a smile of pleasure and kindly amusement on his handsome face. And certainly Charley was a cheerful and goodly sight to see—a fine, strong young fellow, with a clean skin and a clear eye and the "upper class" air of the well fed, well housed, well groomed, who take no thought for the morrow or for anything else.

"Glad to see you," said Murdock heartily.

The instant his eyes met his father's he quailed. He wished he had written instead of coming. Still, now that he was here, he would not show the white feather—for Charley was at the age when males are extremely nervous about their courage—an age most males never pass.

"How are you, sir," said he boldly.

"Did you just want to see New York," inquired Murdock, going direct to the point as always, "or is it some trouble you're in up there?"

"Neither," replied the youth. He hesitated, shot it out. "I got a letter from mother."

"Oh!" Murdock's tone was not formidable, but there was in his tranquil face an expression of something

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going on behind—and that was formidable; so formidable that the boy swallowed hard several times.

“I didn’t come to interfere, gov’nor,” he stammered.

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Murdock dryly, and waited.

“Mother’s frightfully cut up because—” Like an inspiration what Sophy had happened to write about her letting Juliet stay on came back to him. He went forward impetuously: “I just wanted to tell you something that perhaps you don’t know, though she assumes you do. When we were up there with you—mother found out that—that *she* was there—and mother went to the car—and they talked and she pleaded. And, father—*mother* gave her leave to stay on and nurse you.” And the boy, not in the least afraid now, faced his father with straight manly simplicity.

Murdock stared at him astounded. “Impossible!” he exclaimed in a sharp, quick voice.

“It’s the truth,” insisted Charley.

“Impossible!” repeated Murdock in a tone of command—a command that the truth be not the truth since it was inconsistent with his will.

“She did it, father, to help save your life,” maintained the boy. “And I want to ask you if you think you’re giving her a square deal. Of course, she pretends she’s getting the divorce. But I could tell from her letter she’d not be doing it unless you were insisting on it. And I don’t believe you’ll insist, now you know what she did up there. I don’t believe Miss Raeburn’d stand for it.” Charley squared himself, looked defiantly at his father. “If the worst comes to the worst, I’ll go to *her* and tell her. Yes, I will!”

Murdock made an impatient gesture. He was not listening, had hardly heard. The sound of the boy’s

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voice annoyed him. With his second "impossible" he had passed from disbelief to belief, and his whole mind had concentrated upon the central fact. For he realized instantly all that it implied. "It mustn't be true," he muttered, with the furious unreasonableness of the willful. He turned upon Charley. "Does Presbury know this?" he demanded.

"He knows all about it."

"Wait here!" Murdock strode to the door. "I'll be back." And he was gone.

Charley drew himself up proudly. "I thought I could settle it!" said he, with a self-satisfied nod at his own image in a mirror. "Mother knew she wouldn't be appealing in vain."

Murdock descended to the office, telephoned Presbury's house, learned that he was out of town. But he did not return to Charley. He had called up Presbury mechanically; if Presbury had been at home he would not have gone there. He knew now, beyond any power of his will to befog his intelligence, that the boy was telling the truth. He took an auto cab, said "Up the Riverside Drive" to the motorman, threw himself back in the corner and forgot his surroundings. Two things were perfectly clear to him: that it would be cruel—cowardly—contemptible to persist; that, even if he could keep Juliet Raeburn from knowing he had compelled the divorce, he would put her in a dishonorable position—and he would live with her in dread of the day when she should find him out.

Cruel — cowardly — contemptible. A cruel retort upon an act of mercy. A cowardly retort upon an act of courageous self-sacrifice. A contemptible retort upon an act of generosity.

When he first made up his mind to free Sophy and

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himself, the thing had seemed as easy as rational and natural. All that would be necessary was a few formalities, work for the lawyers, and no trouble to Sophy or himself. None of the obstacles that forbid so many ill-mated couples—no difficulties about money or about children; the single strand of the marriage bond would be quietly cut—then, freedom! But gradually he had been learning that there are many and great differences between a marriage contract and other business contracts. Instead of a single strand there were a multitude; and no sooner was one cut than new ones appeared. He had a suffocating, a maddening sense that he was being made the victim of one of fate's savage practical jokes; that he would go on and on struggling to be free, only to find himself at the end still bound, still ridiculously struggling.

He tore apart Sophy's action in letting Juliet stay. He found a score of motives, possible, probable, certain; and none of them was generous. But when he had finished his cynical dissection he was back where he started: Nevertheless, Sophy had done a generous thing, and he had retorted upon her by trampling her. In vain he pleaded to himself that he had the right to be free, that if Sophy were not jealous and short-sighted she would be as eager to be free as he was. There still stood, squarely across the path to his desire, the rock of Sophy's generosity when he was helpless. And he knew that one of her motives—not the determining one, perhaps, but still one of them—had been her kind heart. She had won the right to decide without coercion. If the auto were going a thousand miles an hour instead of ten it couldn't take him away from that. In all his life he had never done a deliberately mean act. Should he begin here and now?

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"I've got the right to do it," he muttered, "and I ought to do it. Why not?"

He felt no softening toward Sophy—felt only as if they two had been playing a game and she, inexpert, bungler, had yet contrived by a fluke to checkmate him, master at the game. If he should leave it to her to say whether or not there should be a divorce, it would not be because conscience commanded it or because he was yielding to gratitude's soft insistence. Those forces he could have routed as easily as can the average man. But the power he hesitated before was fear—fear of that most eccentric and most tyrannical of masters—self-respect. He had never done a deliberate mean act. Should he—could he—to win freedom and Juliet?

As he reëntered his apartment Charley, at ease, smoking a cigarette, rattling and throwing about the Sunday papers, rose and said in his self-assured way, "I had it right, didn't I?"

Murdock looked as calm and deliberate as usual. All signs of haste and agitation were gone. He replied with his customary slow tranquillity, "I'm much obliged to you, Charley."

Charley swelled himself. "I knew you didn't know, and would want to know," he began——

Murdock laid a firm kindly hand on his shoulder. "Never keep on talking when you find you've said enough. You're taking the five o'clock back, aren't you?"

And the boy's prompt and only answer was a meek "Yes, gov'nor."

Toward ten that night Blagden, following his Sunday custom, called up Murdock to find out whether

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anything was wanted. Instead of the usual "Mr. Murdock says there's nothing," from Simcox, it was Murdock's own voice, polite but impatient. "I've been trying to get you since four," said he. "Where are you now?"

"At the club. I was just going to bed. I'm sorry I——"

"That's all right. I'll have to ask you to take a run out to Saint X to-night. Get ready, please, while I'm on the way up to you."

"Glad to go," was Blagden's answer. It would have been prompt in any circumstances; it was distinctly eager. And when, twenty minutes later, the hall boy knocked to tell him Murdock had come he was able to say: "Take down the bag. I'll be there in two minutes," though he had had to change from evening dress and pack for a possible long stay where he especially wished to make his very best appearance. In somewhat less than two minutes he descended, ready for traveling; he was carrying a suit of cream silk pyjamas. "I forgot these," he explained to Murdock, as he unfastened the bag and thrust them in.

"Sorry to upset you in this fashion," said Murdock. "But it's necessary."

By the brilliant lights over the club door Blagden saw the sternness of his features that seemed to add ten years to his age. "Something wrong at the Saint X plant?" asked the secretary, as they rushed up Fifth Avenue.

Murdock apparently did not hear. Blagden ventured nothing further. They entered the park, flew swiftly and noiselessly up the East Drive. Blagden noted that it was just after they passed Miss Raeburn's house, plainly to be seen across the low wall of the park

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nd through the as yet scantily clad trees and bushes, when Murdock broke his silence. "I'm taking you to the 125th Street station," said he.

"But does my train stop there?"

"It will to-night. I had Simcox telephone."

Another long pause. As they shot from the park to 110th Street and started up wide Lenox Avenue, Murdock went on: "I want you to go to Saint X, to the Eyrie, and tell Mrs. Murdock that, unless she herself wishes the divorce proceeding to go on, it can be dropped. Tell her I'm willing to continue as at present, and to provide a separate maintenance—will transfer to her sufficient to cover all her expenses on her present basis of living. If she says she wishes the proceeding dropped, go to my lawyers—talk only to Wickham—Wickham senior—and tell him."

Blagden repeated the instructions, as Murdock had trained him always to do. His voice was so monotonous and strained that Murdock said solicitously, "Are you ill, Blagden?"

"No, oh, no," replied the secretary, in better voice. "A bit tired—that's all. I was playing hard squash all afternoon."

"If you are ill——"

"I assure you I'm not. All I need is rest—sleep."

When the auto drew up at the curb before the railway station, Murdock said, "Please repeat my instructions again."

Blagden glanced at the clock in the auto. "The train's overdue."

"They'll hold it. Their orders are positive. Please repeat. Don't hurry."

Blagden repeated the exact language.

"That's right," said Murdock. "I want the mes-

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sage delivered precisely as I gave it to you. But make no memorandum."

Blagden hastened away, and into the waiting train. He went to bed at once, but not to sleep. With his curtain up and the majestic panorama of Palisades and Catskills and placid Hudson streaming by, clear in the diaphanously misty moonlight, he revolved temptation to villainy. Not *as* temptation to villainy, however. Such temptations always present themselves to intelligent and resourceful—and conscientious—minds as opportunities to do right in a slightly devious way or in a way liable to be misunderstood if discovered by some one with only partial knowledge of the facts. The educated gentleman's conscience is also educated, skilled in logic, proud, acutely honorable. And Melville Blagden was an educated gentleman. He could never do wrong except from a right motive. He would never cut a throat or scuttle a ship as a crime; of what use is education, if not to enable a man to demonstrate that such an act is in the circumstances a virtue eighteen carats fine at least?

XXVI

THE AGNES-FLEURY CORSET

SOPHY kept him waiting nearly two hours ; for, when he arrived, she was deep in most important business that could not be put off.

With the revival of the divorce proceedings had come prompt revival of anxiety about her looks. The very day Blagden brought Murdock's command to resume the divorce suit—indeed, within an hour of his going—she locked herself in her dressing room and examined herself with patient, serious care, unlighted by the faintest gleam of humor. When she finished she lay down and had a good cry—partly over the sad state of disrepair she had found, principally over the impending labor and dieting and general effort, mental and physical. After the cry she admitted her maid and said: "Katy, how much larger is my waist than it was six months ago—when I got those last new corsets?"

"I'll see, ma'am," Katy replied. "I never changed the strings in the last one of Madame Agnes's you wore."

When Katy returned and measured her mistress, corseted tightly but endurably, she announced, "You've taken on a good three inches and five sixteenths, ma'am."

Sophy gazed ruefully at her figure—or lack of it—reflected to her by her mirror. She tried to put on one of the Agnes corsets, made especially to compel her flesh to shapeliness. It was far too small, without letting out

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the lacings; and if the lacings were let out, the whole purpose of the contrivance would be defeated. "I'll have to get a new set," sighed she.

But she was not yet thoroughly roused. Sending for Agnes to measure her and ordering a dozen pairs of the corsets meant exertion, not to speak of the expenditure of nearly two thousand dollars; she put off writing until Katy informed her that her waist measure had increased by another "good inch and a quarter—snug measure." To have watched her during those months of settling back and neglecting what she had learned from Blagden and from New York would have been to have decided that here was a hopeless case. But there was one difference between the two periods of slovenliness, and that difference decisive. The backslidden Sophy did not loll contented in her sloth, was, on the contrary, wretchedly ill at ease, stung by the flies and gnats of anger and shame. When Katy sounded the second warning she acted like the sleeper who lies on after the first call because he hates to leave his warm bed for the cold room and the bother of dressing, though he knows he must, and who at the second call springs out and begins to dash madly about. Sophy did not write Agnes; she telegraphed.

Agnes's woman, Mademoiselle Fleury, arrived on Sunday morning with a trial corset. Sophy was eager for the fitting, but she felt she could not afford to take chances with the higher powers when she was trying their forbearance so severely by her divorce suit. On Monday, at eight in the morning, Mademoiselle Fleury appeared in her dressing room with the corset—Madame Agnes's latest invention for relieving the sufferings of the vanity of women too self-indulgent to diet and too lazy to exercise, by increasing the sufferings of their

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bodies. Taken by pretty Miss Fleury with much proud ceremony from its wrappings of paper and cloth, it was revealed as strange a machine as female ever wore to aid her to gain or maintain sway over the male. It weighed about four pounds and a half, and was a combination corset, back strap and leggings all of steel and stiffest buckram.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Sophy, viewing the uncouth-looking, complicated contraption with repulsion and dismay. "That's much worse than the others. And ain't it going to be covered with satin?"

Up went mademoiselle's eyebrows, lips, shoulders, hands in polite expostulation. "Mais, madame, s' vous plait, il vous don——"

"I'd rather you spoke English," interrupted Sophy crossly.

The young woman had deliberately begun in French, having had experience how vastly American women of the class she played upon were impressed and disadvantaged by it, even where they themselves spoke it, or fancied they did. But she cried, "Ah—pardon!" as if she had been guilty of a stupid blunder. "It is a gran' advance—magnifique. It give madame ze superb—exquise—physique. Ve do not cover him avec—wiz anysings. It make ze bulk too gran'." And, face aglow, hands incessant in graceful gesticulation, manner that impressive seriousness which enables our French friends to invest the most trivial matter with dignity and interest, the young woman explained, chiefly by pantomime, the advantages of the various new bulwarks, retaining walls, fat diffusers, and binding chains. When she had Mrs. Murdock wrought up to the fit pitch, she in peroration to her eloquence put the corset on her as an archbishop might personally invest a monarch with the robes

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and dignities of his sovereignty. This meant full fifteen minutes of artfully concealed struggle and strenuous muscular exertion that showed not at all in mademoiselle's serious-smiling, affable face, but was more than hinted in the drops of sweat beading her pretty brow.

"How well you do your hair, mademoiselle," said Sophy, perspiring profusely also, but patient after the nature of woman the long-suffering. "You must teach my Katy."

"Wis plaisir, madame," said Miss Fleury, bowing gratefully. "But—ze corset!" She stood off and viewed it as if she had suddenly burst upon a rare and beautiful work of art. The steel and buckram crushed in part of the fat, divided the rest, thrusting some of it up toward the chest, coercing more downward to be taken care of by the lower straps, clamps, and plates which mewed up the hips and molded stomach and back to less obstreperous convexity. Mrs. Murdock was large still—that could not be denied. But she now had figure, a figure of the most generous contours, indeed, but one she need not be ashamed of.

"It's really splendid," said, or rather gasped, she, admiring herself front, and with the aid of a large hand glass held by Katy, sides and back. She had a full and fair view, as the corset was applied direct to the skin.

"Madame perhaps finds it snug—a *leetle*?"

"Well, it isn't what you'd call loose," admitted Sophy, trying to take a real breath and failing. "It looks as if I'd have to learn to talk in it without gasping."

"But zat vill pass—" Miss Fleury waved her hand in a vanishing gesture—"entierement. And if madame vill wear it when she sleep, ze figure vill grow to her."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Sophy, gazing at her in

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error. "I can *never* stand it day and night. Only when I have to see people."

"Parfaitement," assented Miss Fleury. "Still, ze figure *graduellement* become madame's veritable figure. It—ze corset—melt away ze fat."

"I believe it," said Sophy. She turned slowly round, admiring her new self from all points of view. "I really *must* be careful what I eat. There's no sense in my not having this figure all the time—naturally, I mean. . . . Those braces and laces at the back begin to cut into me a little, mademoiselle."

"Alas, madame, it is *necessaire*——"

"Oh, I'm not complaining. I'll get used to it. . . . But can I sit down in it?"

Katy brought a chair from the dressing table. Mrs. Murdock slowly bent her knees, tried to sit. "I can't!" she exclaimed, in agony and despair. "Whatever shall I do?" Between sitting and standing she gazed tragically at her image in the mirror.

"It could be let out," suggested Katy, who was on the broad grin. And she hastened from the room to laugh "fit to bust," as she put it in relating the matter afterwards to the assembled backstairs.

"*Mais non! Non!*" protested Miss Fleury. "Madame is large in ze back. It spoil ze tout ensemble to disturb ze contour zere. Is it not so, madame?"

Sophy inspected the rear view of her figure, saw that any relaxation of the pressure would result in an un-ightly, deforming release. "I reckon you're right," he was forced to admit. "But—I've *got* to sit sometimes."

Miss Fleury gazed at the constricting bulge of the corset like a general studying a map of a proposed battlefield. "*Perhaps,*" she finally said, "I could put heffy

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—a heffy elastique zere.” The idea grew more feasible, more promising as she revolved it. “Ah, yes—it is ze vary ting. Heffy—vary heffy elastique vich concede ven madame sit herself, vich close back ven madame stand. I can do it zis morning, and madame can try zis afternoon.”

Sophy’s expression of despondency lifted. “Katy will help you—and anyone else you want,” she said.

She took a last lingering look at her new figure; then Miss Fleury swiftly removed the corset—corslet, rather, for it would have turned bullet or poniard point. As the fastenings sprang open Sophy, with an enormous sigh, expanded to her normal proportions. Miss Fleury, who had been between her and the glass, stood aside. Apparently her movement was accidental; in fact it was one of the thousand and one clever tricks which were forcing Madame Agnes to face the necessity of taking in Miss Fleury as a partner. Not often do we get a sharp impression of the contrast between ourselves as we should be and ourselves as we are. Sophy now had one of those rare unhappy but salutary lessons. An instant before she had seen reflected from that mirror a woman of prodigal proportions indeed, but of proportions; now, there faced her at full length a body—a mass— She became scarlet, and her impulse was to hide her face with her hands, that she might shut out the repellent image and the shame of seeing the pretty French girl, so perfect in figure, and the just-returning Katy observing her. They noted her abject confusion, turned away, and pretended to busy themselves with doing up the corset. Sophy, seeing that she was unobserved, took another look at herself.

“I’m a sight,” she said to herself, “and there’s no denying it.” If she had gone on to make one of those

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grave resolutions wherewith we are always quieting our consciences and preventing ourselves from improving, then and there would have been the end of the incident. But the dart had struck too deep. Sophy made no resolution; she simply became a resolution; she would get rid of those soft rolls and folds of shapeless and sloppy surplusage at any cost. Thenceforth temptation to self-indulgence would be faced and shamed by that repellent image. Vanity, the most potent of human qualities for good as well as for ill, had definitely and finally become the faithful and vigilant ally of her sluggish impulse to self-improvement. At last, Sophy's self-respect was up and doing.

When Blagden's card was brought that afternoon, Sophy was trying on the Agnes model as improved by the Fleury elastic contrivance for permitting the wearer to sit. She found she could seat herself without great effort. "And," said she, "as I get used to it, I think I'll not mind. Now, I've got a feeling that the thing'll—burst—front and back."

"Jamais, jamais, madame," protested Miss Fleury. "*Jamais!*"

"I don't think you could blow it open with dynamite, ma'am," said Katy.

"I reckon not," assented Mrs. Murdock. She hesitated, and with heightened color, "Have you got to take this back to New York with you, mademoiselle?"

"It would be better, madame."

She reflected. "Well," said she, "anyhow I can wear it this afternoon. Your train doesn't leave till after five. Come, Katy, I must dress quickly. I've kept Mr. Blagden waiting too long."

Sophy put on over the new corset a beautiful gray afternoon dress she had bought at Dangerfield's when in

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New York, but had been unable to wear because of the increase in her bulk. Also, she accepted Miss Fleury's offer to do her hair, with the result that its abundance looked attractive, as it had not looked since the illness after the second baby deprived it of much of its original natural beauty of growth and texture. She was not comfortable physically as she descended to the east drawing-room to greet Blagden; but she felt she was looking well, better than she had looked in years, and the moral uplift of that feeling made her mentally content, despite her uneasiness as to what Blagden's visit might mean. When she entered he flushed with pleasure. His glance swept from the "voluptuous figure" directly to the new style of wearing her hair. He had always disliked the old way, which gave a bare, sleek look about the temples and the nape of the neck. "A mighty handsome woman," he said to himself. "And she'd be a stunner if some one who knew something would take her in hand. She certainly does need a man like me."

Sophy had colored as vividly as he; he had let his delight and admiration show plainly in his pleasing, if insignificant, features. "I'm glad to see you again," cried she, extending her hand with a cordial smile.

"And I'm doubly glad," replied he, "as I'm bringing news that's in every way agreeable."

"Really?"

"Mr. Murdock has sent me to ask you to stop the divorce proceedings."

Sophy's face became radiant. "He has come to his senses! I knew he would." And her first thought was, "Perhaps, after all, I'd better take only one of these corsets. They're very trying—and so expensive."

"He says," Blagden was continuing, "if you will

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top the suit, he will agree permanently to make you our present allowance."

Sophy's fine eyes opened wide in wonder. "Make me independent of him?"

Blagden's glance shifted. He *said* nothing.

"Still," she went on, taking his silence for a negative answer, "that doesn't matter, does it?"

Blagden looked grave, but said nothing.

"Whatever brought him round, I wonder? I suppose I mustn't ask you, you're so sensitive about being loyal to him."

The secretary colored. After a pause he gave Mrs. Murdock a curious glance. "You're sure you want to accept?" he said. Then, with an air of contrition, he hastened to add, "Pray, forget I asked that!"

Sophy took alarm. "*Please*, Mr. Blagden," she implored, "tell me what you're thinking." Pathetically—"I've *no one* to advise me."

"You must not ask me. You really must not." He rose in agitation and stood at the window with his back to her.

Sophy was in a panic. "Mr. Blagden!" she pleaded, following him and laying her hand on his arm.

He startled as if her touch had stung him. He gave her a hurried glance, respectful, timid, but burning—and no woman could have mistaken its meaning.

She took her hand lingeringly away; a warm glow of pleasure in her power over this man was suffusing her skin and brightening her handsome eyes. "Mr. Blagden," she urged gently, "you say you are my friend. Advise me."

He stared out of the window for a few seconds; then, turning abruptly to her, he said: "If I were you, Mrs. Murdock, I'd go on with the divorce."

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"I thought you'd say that," exclaimed she. "I've an instinct the same way—" And she had not the faintest suspicion whence that instinct had come. The corset had been cutting into her in a dozen places, but she had been able to endure, even almost to disregard. Now, however, it began to attack her breathing. She hastened to sit down. Sitting required less breath than standing; also the change of position shifted the pressure, easing parts tormented to their limit of endurance. "Yes, that's my instinct. But I can't just—" She hesitated.

He continued to look at her, with that expression of sympathy and reluctance. "You are honest yourself. That makes you too confiding."

"I know, I know," she replied mournfully. "As Charley says I'm a 'good thing.' If it hadn't been for that, I'd never have got into all this trouble."

"You must see, there never can be any *real* reconciliation between you and Mr. Murdock."

"No," she assented. "He has gone too far. I can try to forgive him, but—" Her lip trembled, and her eyes flashed with anger and tears— "I can't ever forget."

"*He* knows that as well as you do."

Blagden let Sophy reflect on this, with the result that she presently said: "It *is* strange, isn't it—his wanting to stop all of a sudden? There's something hidden—some kind of a trap. . . . Please, Mr. Blagden," she begged, "help me! I'm very stupid at these kind of things."

Blagden seemed to be—and *almost* thought himself—struggling between duty to his employer and manly sense of the just and decent. "If you go on with the divorce," he said reluctantly, "you get

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freedom and a fortune. If you don't go on, what do you get?"

Sophy puzzled with this. Despite the distraction of the stabbing and suffocating corset, she presently saw what he was thrusting into her very eyes. "Why!" she cried. "I don't get *anything*, do I? He can begin again whenever he likes! And maybe he'll do it in such a way that he won't have to give me more than a bare living——"

"If that," interrupted Blagden, in a most meaning tone.

"Oh, *what* a scoundrel!" cried Sophy. And her physical pain—the stabbing into her sides, the tingling and pinching under the elastic—was as a fiery goad to her wrath. "I see it all! What a fool I was, not to know at once that such a man as he is wouldn't make a move unless it was to get some underhanded advantage." Impulsively she stretched out both her hands to Blagden, and he took them. The gesture gave her momentary relief from her tormentor. "I'll not accept his proposition!" she cried with flashing eyes. "Now that I've begun, I'll go on to the bitter end. I won't have this awful, wicked business dragging and nagging at me."

Blagden pressed her beautiful hands enthusiastically. "How sensible you are, my *dear* friend!" he exclaimed. "Now that you've taken the right course, I feel free to say I was in terror lest you'd not see the trap."

"See it? Why, I was sure to see it. He always did think I was a fool. But I'm not."

"If I were you, I'd telephone for my lawyer this very afternoon, and make him hurry matters. You see, Mrs. Murdock, I've got to go back at once and report. I can't possibly put off my report longer than

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day after to-morrow. But much can be done to-morrow—before I arrive in New York. I imagine Murdock had everything arranged with the judge. You know, he can do about what he pleases with the courts——”

“But,” interrupted Sophy shrewdly, “suppose he should refuse to make the settlement he promised?”

Blagden had canvassed this in his solitary council of war on the train the night before. He had the answer ready: “Your lawyer has it in writing. Besides, isn’t it very evident that for some reason—you mustn’t ask me what reason—you have him in your power for the moment? Use your power, while you have it, Mrs. Murdock. I know this sounds disloyal to him. But my conscience is clear. I am acting in what’s really his best interest as well as in yours.” And Blagden looked it, and felt it.

“You needn’t tell *me* that, Mr. Blagden,” Sophy earnestly answered him. “I know it without your saying it. I know an honest man when I see one. And trust a woman’s instinct to judge a sincere, disinterested friend.”

Blagden blushed furiously. “Sincere,” he said in a low, hesitating voice, “but not disinterested. If I’ve exceeded my right, it’s because— But I mustn’t say that— Forgive me.”

Sophy smiled quickly and friendlily at the aristocratic-looking, fashionably dressed young man. What a lovely skin did go with red hair; and really, the hair was of the most aristocratic red—not in the least common and carroty. Besides she felt that he could be highly useful to her, indeed was necessary; it would be most unwise to discourage him in his—friendliness.

“This is the last service I shall ever perform for

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him," Blagden continued after the long, surcharged pause. "I shall resign as soon as I make my report. You don't know how repulsive this whole business has been to me!"

"But you mustn't resign," pleaded Sophy. She had been eager to go, that she might hasten to her room and free herself from the suffocating grip of her corset. This new anxiety diverted her mind again. "Indeed you mustn't leave—until the divorce is granted."

Blagden shook his head.

"For my sake, Mr.—Blagden—for my sake! It will only be for a few weeks." Smiling and blushing, "I forbid you to resign!"

Blagden heaved a sigh. "Perhaps it is my duty," he said—and he meant it. He half turned away. "I cannot resist you," he muttered, so low that she could pretend to think he believed she had not heard.

"Thank you," she said gently. And she took his hand and pressed it. "Whatever should I have done without you! God has been good to me. He has raised up a friend for me in my hour of affliction."

"I would—would—do—*anything* for you," he burst forth. Then, in real agitation—for he had not intended to go so far—he hastened away. And she, at the end of physical endurance of the torments her "figure" was causing, made no effort to detain him, though she had a sense that the talk between them was somehow incomplete.

On the evening express for New York traveled Blagden and the pretty little corset maker. Blagden was ensconced in luxury in a Pullman compartment. Miss Fleury and her bundle were tucked away in a

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stuffy seat in a day coach; thus she could without violating her conscience collect from Madam Agnes the price of a sleeping car berth. Both were bearers of Sophy Murdock's destiny. It is difficult to say—is it not?—which had the more important share of the burden.

XXVII

MR. BLAGDEN'S BAD QUARTER HOUR

At his club again, Blagden searched his mail, sick with anxiety. Suppose Sophy—changeable, with no self-reliance, “thoroughly womanly”—should have telegraphed him that she had changed her mind and would accept Murdock’s terms—what should he do? He had been able to think of no plan that did not involve in its execution a frank throwing away of self-respect—the necessity that in acting he confess himself to himself a plain rascal. “I’ll let her go,” he had been saying. I will not do a dishonorable trick even for her sake, even to save her from her own weak womanly goodness of heart.” But his self-reassurances of unshaken high principle somehow did not reassure; and he was reading the approach of a situation that would empty him perhaps beyond his moral strength.

He was enormously relieved when he found no telegram from her, so relieved that he was almost reconciled to a message awaiting him from Murdock—“Mr. Murdock wishes to see you at his hotel, no matter what time you get in.”

Blagden read this gloomily, angrily. Eager for pretexts for hating Murdock, he read into its curt directness the arrogance of master to slave. “I’m too tired to go to-night,” said he to himself. “I can pretend I didn’t get this message.”

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Even as he decided for delay the doorman came to him. "Mr. Murdock's man, Simcox, is waiting for you, sir."

Blagden's sudden sinking at the heart showed it was not altogether fatigue from the journey that had made him seek to delay facing his employer. "You told him you didn't know whether I was in or not?"

"He was at the corner, sir, when you got out of your cab. He saw you come in."

"I might have known!" muttered Blagden. "That damned scoundrel never takes chances." Mentally his name for Murdock now was "that scoundrel"; it seemed to aid him to keep steady the point of view that he was not a traitor, but an honest man unfortunately so placed that his high-minded actions might be misinterpreted as treason.

In the servant's waiting room stood Simcox, grim, funereal, suggesting to him the guard that leads the prisoner to execution. "Mr. Murdock told me to come here and stay round, sir, until eleven. He thought possibly you might return by the ten-fifteen to-night."

"I'll drive down to him straight away," said Blagden, with such offhandedness of manner as he could muster.

Outside, he climbed into a hansom and told Simcox to get in also. "Thank you, sir," said Simcox. He, all servants, liked Blagden because he, so certain of his superiority that he was not disturbed about that particular kind of "appearances," had a highly attractive democratic way with his "inferiors." All the way down the avenue Blagden was nerving himself for the ordeal. He knew Murdock, knew what it meant to face that mind accustomed to meeting and vanquish-

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g all the forms of indirection. True, Murdock was not in the least suspicious of him, and was probably eager for just the news he was bringing—there lay his hope of getting through without discovery and disaster. "But," reflected the secretary, "if I'm mistaken, and he really wants her to stop that divorce suit, he'll act as he always does when he's in earnest—he'll tear every word I say to pieces and find out all that's in it and under it."

Never had Blagden been put to such a test as in preparing for that interview. And it was proof of the essential strength of his character that his nerves were steady and his features calm when he entered the salon of Murdock's suite, where Murdock and Berkeley, in dinner jackets, were talking sport listlessly.

He assumed he would immediately be taken aside and questioned. Instead, Murdock, after a handshake, and without glancing at him, invited him to be seated, and the servant bring him brandy and soda, drew him into the conversation. Half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half passed; Murdock showed no sign of impatience, but talked, and—sure evidence of willingness to continue—asked Berkeley questions involving extended answers. "If it wasn't for that note at the club," thought Blagden, "I'd believe he didn't care a damn." The conversation dragged on and on, until Blagden's whole body was aching with the nervous tension of frightful suspense. "If he'd only send Berkeley away and begin!" he groaned, as he fought against the impulse to take a drink of the brandy.

At last Berkeley rose, yawned cavernously. "I'll be off to bed," said he.

"Better finish your cigar," urged Murdock.

Berkeley tossed it into an ash tray. "I forgot

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and lighted one more than my allowance. Come on, Blagden. He wants to go to bed."

"Don't go just yet," said Murdock to Blagden. "I want a word with you."

The secretary shivered; for Murdock's tone was unnatural, ominous. Had Sophy telegraphed him direct? It was most dangerous, this conduct in a man who had always theretofore been for dispatching an affair forthwith. As the sound of the outer door closing behind Berkeley came to them, Murdock said: "Splendid chap, physically—Berkeley—isn't he?"

"Superb," replied Blagden.

"How he does enjoy life!" continued Murdock. "He drinks it as a connoisseur drinks a fine wine—tasting each drop."

"That's why he's unattractive to me, I fancy," said Blagden. "He seems so—so lacking in generosity."

"Generosity? My dear Blagden, no man who has made his own fortune is ever generous. The habit of insisting on full value for each dollar—and more—is too strongly developed."

"I've seen no sign of it in you." Blagden took on a judicially impersonal air whenever he thus frankly flattered, and so carried it off without offense or seeming of degradation.

"I won by gambling, chiefly," replied Murdock. "Then, too, perhaps, I keep my true disposition a little better concealed. Few of us have the courage to be as frankly Sybarite as Tom. We lie to others and to ourselves about our real tastes and methods and motives. Deception—self-deception!" He smiled grimly. "We go through life—most of us—knowing less about ourselves than we do about our most casual

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quaintances. That's because, when we study ourselves, we study our minds instead of our acts—ourselves in repose, and sleeked up for inspection, instead of in action."

The secretary flamed and paled. Was this a hit at him? Was this the sardonic glitter of the jaws of a trap?

"Acts!" repeated Murdock, with an absent-mindedness that seemed studied to the unnerved Blagden. "Acts reveal the man. Not what he professes or imagines—not the lies he tells himself in excuse or in flattery. Only acts count."

Blagden set his teeth together hard. He felt that Murdock was indeed playing with him as cat with mouse. He grew weak, sick from head to foot.

Murdock lapsed into silence. Presently he said, unobtrusively, "Still, Tom Berkeley is happy—happy in mind and in body—exasperatingly sane—but happy because of it. He drinks the wine of life alone, but we can enjoy it that way. I envy him."

Murdock had dropped into the corner of the lounge where his face was shaded from the light. After a few silent puffs at his cigar, he almost exploded in an interrogative, "Well?"

Blagden shook his head, wet his lips several times. "I regret to have to report, sir," he said constrainedly, "that I've failed."

"Didn't you see her?" demanded Murdock harshly. The false note in his envoy's voice had not escaped him.

"Yes—certainly."

"What did she say?"

Blagden nerved himself. "She's determined to go on."

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Murdock sank deeper among the cushions. His cigar dropped from between his relaxing fingers to the floor. Blagden tried in vain to see his face. "What does that mean?" he inquired, after a moment.

"To go on with the divorce."

"Her exact words?"

"She—she—said—said a great deal. I—" Blagden with trembling fingers picked up Murdock's fallen cigar, slowly crossed the room to put it in an ash bowl.

"You misunderstood her," said Murdock bluntly.

Blagden clenched his teeth; his nails bit into his palms.

"You'll have to go back."

Instantly Blagden relaxed, grew weak in the revulsion. It was now clear that his fears had been groundless, that Murdock had been hesitating and putting off through dread lest the result of the mission would not be what he longed. No, Murdock knew nothing, or he'd not be saying, "You'll have to go back." Blagden spoke out boldly: "She made herself very clear, sir. She said: 'Tell him a reconciliation or any arrangement but absolute and immediate divorce is impossible. Tell him I shall expect him to abide by the terms agreed on with my lawyers.'"

Murdock slowly lifted himself, stood, paced the floor, his head bent, his hands behind his back. At one end of the room he would pause to stare up into the leaves of the huge palm; at the other end he would halt to gaze absently down upon the books and magazines littering a table. He kept muttering, "She never said that—never." In those ten minutes Blagden realized what few human beings ever have opportunity to realize in their whole lives—that there actually can be

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mental anguish more savage, more searching than the fiercest physical pain. Suddenly Murdock wheeled sharply upon him. "What did *you* say to her?" he demanded. And those blue eyes of his seemed to Blagden to be searching every corner of his soul under a flooding light.

"I—I— We talked—mostly commonplaces. Naturally, I would not presume to——"

But Murdock had already turned away. He had instantly dismissed the vagrant suspicion as merely the precaution of his habit of neglecting no possibility however preposterous, in the survey of a situation. He resumed his muttering, not so low that the words escaped Blagden's terror-sharpened ears. "Who can it have been? . . . She never made up her mind to that—alone. . . . Probably those lawyers. . . . Yes, it must have been those greedy jackals. I must fix her property so they can't get it away from her. . . . Yes, the lawyers."

Murdock flung himself at full length on the lounge and, his hands clasped under his head, stared up at the lofty ceiling. Usually, when he found an explanation that explained, he dismissed a problem as solved; but he could not dismiss this. "What difference does it make how she happened to do what I wanted?" he said to himself, irritated that his mind continued to vex itself with the trifle and refused to relax and enjoy the all-important fact that he had gained his point.

"If you'll permit me, sir," began the secretary timidly.

"Yes?" said Murdock.

"There can be no possible doubt of Mrs. Murdock's meaning. Her manner was very convincing. She said: 'He offered me freedom and independence. I accepted.

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Now, I'll not draw back.' Perhaps I'm doing no good by repeating it, but she seemed very bitter against you, had a very false—I assured her in vain it was false—
notion about you and—a lady."

Murdock stirred. "No matter!" said he. "I'm convinced you're not mistaken."

"I simply couldn't be," reiterated Blagden. "Language could not have been clearer than hers was. And her manner was most—most resolute."

Murdock sat up, waved his arm in dismissal of the subject. Blagden, restless, began to wander about the room. He saw and touched a bundle on the chair by the table. "Something for me to look after, sir?" inquired he.

"A house I've taken near Nice for the winter. Look at them." He joined Blagden, opened the bundle, fell to exhibiting and discussing the prints and photographs. The chief difference between youth and age is youth's energetic, impatient enthusiasm, age's lack of it; and this difference, physical in its origin, is mental in its first deep effects, thence gradually reacting with ever-increasing power upon the physical appearance. Murdock had retained almost unimpaired this fresh and vivid interest in life; but during the past ten years it had been subdued by his responsibilities and anxieties and by his constant association with older men. To-night, as he talked of the villa by the Mediterranean where he purposed to spend the winter, and as the weight of his marriage burden rolled from him, he began to act and to look like a boy. Blagden watched him grow youthful with the same sort of wonder one feels in watching the performance of an Oriental magician. There was to the secretary something uncanny about this transformation, some suggestion of Faust's bargain with the devil.

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Murdock had always been simple and direct with Blagden, but had kept a narrow but deep gulf between them, the gulf of his natural reserve of the leader who is forced consciously or unconsciously to keep himself wrapped in the mystery that is his best aid in maintaining discipline and docility. Now, he was laughing and joking, with eyes sparkling and hands active in free, expansive gestures. He even clapped Blagden upon the shoulder two or three times. And, in spite of himself, Blagden yielded to his magnetism, began really to like him, began to feel as if Murdock were his friend, to forget that he was a person to be hated, to be envied, to be courted for the sake of what there was "in it."

The telephone bell clicked insistently. Murdock glanced at the clock. "After one!" he exclaimed. "Old man, I'm sorry. You must be tired. Why didn't you rein me in?" He took down the receiver. As he listened his face clouded. "Where?" he asked. "At the house in Madison Avenue? Yes—yes—I'll come at once."

He hung up the receiver. "Would you believe it?" he cried to Blagden. "I never saw Berkeley looking so fit as this evening—and in the best spirits. You remember what we were saying. Well—he's been taken ill—dangerously ill, the doctor says—which probably means, as usual, simply the first move in laying the foundation for a big bill. Let's hope so. However, I'm going over. Perhaps you'd be willing to come." Murdock pressed a button in the wall near him. "It's not much out of your way. I'll send you on to your club, and the cab can come back for me. . . . Simcox, my hat and a light coat."

"The air's very sharp, sir," said Simcox, appearing in the doorway.

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“The light one. I couldn’t stand fur.” And he expanded his chest, threw back his handsome head, his eyes alight, his face smiling. “What selfish beasts we are!” thought he. “Poor Tom! Yet I can’t feel it. I can’t even pretend.”

XXVIII

"MY REPUTATION MUST BE SAVED"

On the way Murdock said: "Fortunately, Mrs. Berkeley is in Washington. This house we're going to—it's where Miss Hollingshead lives—the actress."

"Has Berkeley taken her up? I thought it was still Jessie Pomeroy."

"He drained that cup. He had a sudden complete change of taste—from buxom maturity to the greenest juvenility—to Bertha Hollingshead—not eighteen—little and thin—comic-opera star—pretty, but the exact opposite of all Tom's fancies heretofore. . . . Queer man, Tom. There are many sides to his character that one sees only after knowing him years."

They were at the door of a brown-stone house—one of a row, and hidden in the middle of the row. "You are to go straight up to the bedroom, Mr. Murdock," said the half-dressed servant who opened the door as they ascended the steps. "We're not allowed on that floor—doctor's orders."

"Wait here a moment, Blagden," said Murdock, and he hurried up the stairs.

A young man, looking and smelling the doctor, was pacing in agitation the second-story hall. "Mr. Murdock?" he asked, as Murdock reached the head of the stairs. "They are waiting for you." And he opened the door of a small salon. Murdock entered; the young

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doctor followed him, closed the door quickly and noiselessly. "Mr. Berkeley is still alive," said he. "But he can live only a few minutes."

Murdock, astounded, stared at the young man, then gazed round the room as if seeking the explanation of a statement so unbelievable. The little salon was gaudy, yet not altogether without taste, and it had individuality—the individuality of a gorgeous, luxurious, whimsical cocotte. At the gilt table in the center sat a girl, childishly pretty, her artificially waved hair in disorder, a blue silk dressing gown over her nightgown, both open wide. There was a faint fascinating tracery of tiny blue veins upon her white shoulders and slim, new-fledged bosom. Her small face rested upon her hands—too carefully manicured hands, which still suggested that they had passed through rougher days. Her large eyes, blue in the pale way of the earliest violets, were glazed and fixed, staring straight before her, as if she were out of her mind. The young doctor stopped the nervous twisting of the tail of his little blond Vandyke, touched her gently on the shoulder. As if his touch had carried a terrific electric shock she bounded to her feet, opened her mouth to an incredible width, showing its whole interior, red as a ripe watermelon. Just in time, the doctor seized her by the nape of the neck, clapped his palm over her lips, and partly stifled the scream which was issuing.

"Hush!" he commanded sternly. "Hush, I say!"

"Oh, don't take me," she moaned, sinking back into the chair. "I didn't kill him! I swear to God I didn't."

"This isn't the police. It's Mr. Murdock." And he grasped her bare shoulder and shook her. "Mr. Murdock!" he repeated, as if she were deaf.

But Murdock was not heeding. The instant he

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grasped what had happened he saw its full meaning for him. Another delay! For, such a scandal as this—about his ex-partner and most intimate friend—could not but stir up a storm that would compel him to put off his divorce, in justice to Juliet. He could hear press, pulpit, public shrieking about the “loose morals,” the “lawless lives.” He could hear the hue and cry for “the woman in the case”—and they’d find her—and would pillory her.

“This must be hushed up!” he cried. Then, remembering himself, he looked at the young actress who was staring vaguely at him. “Don’t you know me, Bertha?” he asked, standing directly in front of her.

She gazed up at him, slowly became reassured. “I didn’t kill him, Mr. Murdock,” she pleaded. Her eyes closed, she shuddered, collapsed in a heap in the big chair.

“Where is Mr. Berkeley?” asked Murdock of the doctor.

The young man indicated a door to the right. “Go in,” he said. “I must stay here. She’s got a scant spoonful of brains, and they’re thoroughly addled now. I’ve been having the devil’s own time with her.”

Murdock opened the door, was in a bedroom—evidently a woman’s bedroom, with wall coverings and hangings of pale-blue silk, the ceiling a fresco of Venus charioted by Cupids, the bed with hand-painted head and footboards, its pale-blue silk coverings tossed this way and that upon footboard and floor. In the bed lay Berkeley at full length, his coat, waistcoat, and pumps removed, his shirt and undershirt cut away, baring the white, firm, muscular flesh and curling gray hair of his broad, flat chest. Over him, on either side, were bending Dr. Presbury and another. Presbury was probing into

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a round ringed hole just above the heart. As Murdock reached the foot of the bed Presbury straightened himself with a grunt of irritation. "Hell!" he muttered.

In Berkeley's voice came, "No use, eh, doctor?"

"Here's Mr. Murdock," replied Presbury.

With an effort Berkeley turned his head. His face was yellow, the cheeks sunken, the piglike nose a frozen white, the eyes withdrawn far into the head and surrounded by deep circles of blue-black, like bruises. They were unmistakably the eyes of a dying man; theirs was that look of everlasting farewell which appears even when lying hope still reigns within. Berkeley smiled faintly in the direction of Murdock. "Suppose it's you, Charles," said he, hoarsely and jerkily. "Can't see your features. Hell of a mess—eh?"

Murdock's face was showing that sincerity of sympathy and tenderness of which only strong natures, strongly roused, are capable. For the moment he almost forgot his own plight. He seated himself on the bed. "What can I do?" said he.

Berkeley's eyes were closed. He stopped his horrible gasping for breath, drew his wide-open mouth together enough to say, "Tell him about it, Presbury."

"He came here after midnight," explained Presbury rapidly, raising his voice to make it reach above the noise of Berkeley's gulpings for breath. "The servants had gone to bed. Hollingshead herself answered—she was rather expecting him. A woman rushed up the steps and entered with him——"

"Jessie!" gasped Berkeley. "It was Jess, Murdock! The——" He ended with a vile epithet.

"Hollingshead, in a fright, ran up the stairs, the woman after her," Presbury went on. "Berkeley followed—caught up with them in the salon—tried to

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wrench the pistol away from Jessie. It went off—or she fired in a rage——”

“She said she’d kill me, since I wouldn’t let her kill Bertha,” gasped Berkeley. “God! God!” And he resumed the frightful clamorous gulping for air.

“The woman shot—ran—downstairs—out—away. Hollingshead telephoned for me, without rousing the servants.”

Berkeley’s hand fumbled about for Murdock’s, caught it, held it in a grasp so fierce that it pained. “This must be hushed up,” he said. “You can do it, Charley.”

“Yes,” said Murdock. “It shall be hushed up.”

Presbury shrugged his shoulders. “It has been done in such cases—a good many times.”

“I tell you it *must* be done!” said Berkeley. He raised himself in the bed. “It *must* be done! My reputation *must* be saved, God damn it!”

The blood poured from his mouth, from his ears, pouted over his bare chest, so white and strong-looking, lrenched the curling gray hair there. He fell back dead, his eyes and mouth wide, streaks of blood upon his cheeks, broad, trickling, crimson smear down his chin and throat. And the long, humorous thrust of the piglike nose made the face seem a grotesque mask, sensual as a satyr, foolish as a clown.

“A hell of a mess,” said Presbury, looking disgustingly at the dead man and the rivulets of blood running off his body.

Murdock roused himself. “We must get to work,” said he sharply. The corpse was not his friend Berkeley, but an obstacle to his plans that must be removed. “Let your assistant attend to this. Come into the next room.”

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Bertha was lying on the sofa now, in a deep sleep, and the young doctor was slowly pacing the floor. "What do you advise?" asked Murdock of Presbury.

"What's the use? Let it come out."

"No," said Murdock. "I simply meant, what must be done to hush it up?"

"The woman's running wild—probably telling everybody."

"Not likely," said Murdock. "The chances are a million to one the instant she saw what she'd done she came to her senses——"

"Servants always suspect."

Murdock seated himself at the table and reflected. "We'll take him to the hotel," he finally said, "and have him die there of—say, of heart disease?"

"The servants know he's here," objected Presbury. "We mustn't try to conceal too much."

Murdock frowned impatiently. "We can disregard the servants. Who'd dare publish their whisperings, with you doctors and me against them—and all the surface appearances correct?"

"The authorities—the coroner—the district attorney," reminded Presbury.

"I can take care of them if it becomes necessary. The main point is to get Tom to the hotel."

"But all those bloody clothes in there?"

"We'll take them along. Hollingshead's servants will think it natural that his friends should get him out of this house."

"But——" Presbury pointed to the young woman in the morphine stupor on the lounge.

"She must sail for Europe in the morning—with our young friend here on the same steamer. Money will keep her quiet—for the time—and that's all that's

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necessary. The next few days — weeks — are the crucial——”

“Impossible, Murdock,” said Presbury. “Impossible. The more I think of it, the less feasible it is.”

Murdock rose, laid his hand strongly on the doctor’s shoulder. “Not only not impossible, but easy.”

“I don’t see it. I’m willing to take long chances. But—if we’re caught——”

“We’ll not be caught. It will cost something, but there’ll be no scandal. You and your assistants will dress Berkeley. We will send the house servants upstairs. We will ourselves carry him to a carriage, and take him up to his apartment in the hotel by the private entrance. He will die there to-morrow or, rather, this afternoon, or next day, with his wife by his side. Simcox, my valet—he’s my friend, too, perhaps the best I’ve got in the world—will come here before we leave. He’ll take charge, lock up these rooms, hold the servants together for a week, then pay them off and dismantle the house.”

Presbury’s long, thin finger was pointing to the floor in front of the sofa where the girl lay. There was a great dark stain upon the light carpet. Murdock, on impulse that showed how matters were with him beneath his smooth, languid surface, dragged a rug across the room and covered the stain. “Simcox will attend to that. Now, to work. My secretary’s in the hall downstairs. I’ll send him for a carriage.”

Presbury bent over the sleeping girl. “She’s safe for an hour or so,” said he. “Come on, Dodge.”

The two doctors entered the bedroom and closed the door. Murdock went into the hall and called Blagden. When they were together at the head of the stairs, he said in an undertone: “Berkeley has had an attack of heart disease. He may not live. We are going to move

him to the hotel. He can't be allowed to die in this house."

Blagden's expression was peculiar.

"What is it?" asked Murdock.

"The butler down there says he thinks he heard a shot."

"Butlers always think they hear shots. Please go to the hotel and send Simcox at once. And come back in half an hour—not sooner—with a carriage. Don't get out of the carriage; just have the coachman draw up in front of the door."

"And Berkeley's valet?"

"Um—yes— See him at once. Tell him Berkeley's very ill. Send him off to Washington by the newspaper train to help Mrs. Berkeley hurry here. He'll barely have time to catch it. Telephone the station master at Jersey, so he'll have no trouble." Murdock gave Blagden's arm a friendly pressure. "I appreciate your thinking of that chap, Blagden."

The secretary had a thrill of that pleasure wherewith any recognition however trivial from the great fills the less. "I'll hustle him off. Shall I telegraph Mrs. Berkeley?"

"Yes—to be delivered at seven o'clock. It would be useless to disturb her earlier."

It was Blagden's turn to admire and wonder—Murdock, hard, cold, inconsiderate, yet in this hour of excitement, thinking of such a trifle as the sleep of a woman who was nothing to him, a woman he did not like. "Everything shall be attended to," said Blagden. "Some one ought to talk to the butler about his notion that there was a shot." He looked directly and significantly at Murdock. "He is very positive—and probably garrulous."

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"I'll see to that," said Murdock. "On second thought, send the carriage and stay at the hotel. Wait at the private entrance."

Blagden hastened away; Murdock returned to the salon. Bertha, still asleep, was lying on her back now and breathing rather heavily through her open mouth; but the sight was not unattractive, so childlike did she look. Murdock gazed at her pityingly, then roused her by shaking her with gentle firmness. She pushed back her thick waving hair, passed her hand over her eyes several times, gradually returned to consciousness and to pain and terror. Murdock's gaze was steady and stern; before it she slowly settled against the back of the sofa and began to weep.

"You are awake?" said he. "You hear me? You understand?"

She nodded.

"Tom is dead."

She gave a startled cry. "I didn't shoot him. Before God I didn't!" And she clasped her hands stagily, and her waved hair fell in clusters about her pretty childish face and throat.

"We do not care to hear anything about that," Murdock interrupted commandingly. "We purpose to hush up this scandal. You are to leave for Europe by the first steamer that sails in the morning. Dr. Dodge is to accompany you. Whether you are guilty or not, we will protect you—if you behave yourself."

Like all people of feeble mentality and strong primal motions her first instinct was to oppose; she drew down her brows and her mouth sullenly. "I'll not go," said he. "I've done nothing wrong."

"Who shot Mr. Berkeley?" asked Murdock, his voice cold.

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"I don't know her," Bertha whimpered. "She followed him in, and——"

"She? Who?"

"I don't know."

"Then it is your word against all these circumstances. But if you go quietly away you will get into no trouble. There will be no scandal. We will take Mr. Berkeley to his hotel, and he will die of heart disease there."

"My God, and I have no money!" cried Bertha. "He always kept me close. He was a dog—a dog!" She checked herself in terror. She fell on her knees before him. "No, I didn't mean that," she moaned. "You mustn't use it against me."

Murdock seemed inexorable. "Nothing will be used against you if you do as I say—do what is best for you. And you will be well taken care of." He took out his pocketbook, took from it several bills of large denomination, tossed them into her lap as she sat upon her heels on the floor. He smiled satirically at her instant change of expression—tribute to the shrewdness of his guess as to the wisest way quickly to come to terms with the sort of human nature before him.

"Then I'll go," said she. Now, she felt she was secure. The sight of the money had brought home to her how powerful a protector she had in Murdock, had convinced her that he was sincere. "Anyhow," she went on, "I want to get away from all this and try to forget it. Oh, I *wish* I'd never seen him! What have I got out of it? Nothing but promises I knew he'd not keep, though I was fool enough to live on them." Not thinking what she was doing, she thrust a slim girlish leg from her skirts and tucked the bills

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to the thin blue silk stocking. "I did whatever he wanted just because he was rich; and a comparatively poor man would have done better by me. . . . I must go into—" She turned her eyes slowly, timidly toward the door behind which lay the tragedy.

"You can't get into your bedroom for half an hour."

She shuddered. "I'd not dare go!"

"Dr. Dodge will pack for you. You needn't take much along. He'll see that you get everything—in Paris."

At that magic word—Paris—her mind was off her shoes again, was flitting up and down the Rue de la Paix which she had been dreaming of and longing for ever since she outgrew dreaming of and longing for heaven. "A trunk and all I really need are in my dressing room. I can get in there from the hall."

She rose from the floor, light, graceful, eager, as if he were making an entrance on the stage. Murdock accompanied her to the hall door of the dressing room, saw her safely in and busy with her trunk and traveling bag and humming under her breath one of the gay tunes of her opera. There was a bitter smile on his somber face as he turned away. The last time he had seen her with Berkeley, she was on his knee, running his hair, pulling his ears and calling him fond names in melting tones. "But why not?" he reflected. "Tom wanted only what he paid for—and he got it."

In the bedroom he found Presbury and Dodge pressing Berkeley's still warm body and lightening the labor by cheerful, half-jesting remarks. Brierly, the other physician, was making into two small and compact bundles all the blood-stained articles. "The mat-

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tress is hopeless," said he, pausing to look up at Murdock. "You'll see, when they get him dressed and off it."

"Simcox will attend to that," said Murdock. "Fortunately, it's not too late in the season for furnace fires. . . . There'll be plenty of time. No one but Simcox will ever see this room as it is."

"He's ready—even to the shoes," Presbury now announced. "We found a business outfit of his, complete, and dressed him in that. Dodge suggests that at the hotel we'd better perform an operation that'll hide the wound. Bright idea, that—original." He laughed at the assistant, went on ironically, "You've got brains, Dodge—real brains. What a mess we'd have made without you."

"Yes," assented Murdock absently. He was staring, sick and fascinated, at Berkeley's figure, fully dressed and propped to a half-sitting, half-reclining position. He felt that his stomach was about to give way. No one, not used to the sight of death, can view it unmoved; and when it is stripped of all dignity, as it was there, its effect is not melancholy but repulsive. "I must get the butler out of the way," said he, hastily leaving the room.

In the lower hall was Simcox, as always like a funeral mute, with the disheveled, half-dressed butler talking excitedly to him. Murdock took him into the reception room and closed the door. "Mr. Blagden told you what has happened?" he began.

"Yes, sir," said Simcox. "I've just been assuring the butler he was mistaken about the shot."

"We are going to carry Mr. Berkeley away. You will take full charge here—keep the servants to their own quarters until morning—yourself straighten out

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he room upstairs, and lock it up till you've paid off and got rid of the servants. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"You will find things that might lead people to believe Mr. Berkeley was a victim of violence. No one else must see those things. They must be got out of sight before morning. Then, they must be burned."

"They will be, sir. In the furnace."

Years of close association with Murdock had given the valet the master's imperturbable manner and, by reaction of exterior upon interior, much of Murdock's calmness and decision. Murdock put out his hand and Simcox took it. "I trust you—entirely," said Murdock. "It's an ugly business, but you and I will see it through. It's important for me, personally—most important—that this be smoothed over."

Simcox's only change was in the eyes. He showed here that Murdock had now roused him to the kind of interest which quickens the mind like cocaine. All he said was his usual "Yes, sir."

"When you get the butler on the top floor, and are sure the lower part of the house is clear, come to the salon just over this room."

Murdock peered through the shutters; the carriage had come. He went back to the second floor, waited in the salon until Simcox appeared. He opened the bedroom door. "Now!" said he to Presbury.

Simcox preceded, with the two bundles; then came the doctors bearing Berkeley as if he were helplessly drunk or ill; then Murdock. The procession descended the stairs, passed out into the deserted street. Two blocks up, under a lamp-post, stood a policeman; but he happened to be looking the other way. As they lifted the body into the carriage, Brierly for the

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benefit of the coachman, gave two deep, agonized groans. And again Murdock all but staggered under a wave of nausea; Presbury muttered in a jocosely undertone, "Good business, Brierly. You must do that again, and curse a little, as we lift him out."

"Drive slowly and very carefully, coachman," cautioned Murdock, the last to enter. He put his hand out through the window and shook the hand of his valet once more. "I count on you, Simcox," said he. As the carriage drove away, he saw Dodge and Simcox reëntering the house.

The short drive was made in silence. Brierly sat beside the corpse, Presbury opposite it, Murdock next him and grateful for the sharp night air blowing full upon his face, damp with the sweat of weakness and nausea. The two blood-soaked bundles were in the lap of the corpse, Presbury steadying them. Once Murdock shot a glance at his dead friend, tottering in stiff lifelessness with every slight motion of the carriage. The head was covered with a fur cap drawn well down; its visor hid the upper part of the face, but Murdock saw the lower part—the fallen jaw, the protruding tongue. "God!" he muttered. "God!" And his brain and his stomach reeled.

At the private entrance to the hotel stood Blagden. He came to the curb, leaned in at the carriage window. "I've been able to get the porter away," said he. "Told him you were bringing Berkeley home considerably soused and didn't want anyone to see. The door's open."

"Good!" said Presbury. "It begins to look as if we'd succeed."

The corpse was far into the *rigor mortis* now and exceedingly difficult to handle. Murdock and Blagden

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took each a bundle; Murdock engaged the coachman in a discussion about the fare. Brierly groaned and cursed loudly enough for the coachman to hear. Presbury assisted the deception with soothing, reassuring remarks. "Patience, Mr. Berkeley. . . . Just a moment, now. . . . We're doing the best we can." As soon as the body was clear of the carriage, Blagden shut the door. Murdock handed the coachman a bill, and before the strangely burdened group had got within the narrow private entrance, the coach was far down the street. The ascent of four flights of narrow stairway was made with the greatest awkwardness. Once Brierly lost his hold on the corpse and it rolled heavily against Presbury who, as the stronger, was behind with Blagden to assist. Presbury staggered, almost fell backwards down the stairs. After that Presbury went in front and took the corpse by the collar, dragging it upward, the two others pushing it, and Murdock carrying both bundles. After half an hour of labor, the corpse was dropped in Berkeley's bed, lay there with elbows and knees bent and head fantastically awry. Its bearers sank exhausted on the satin upholstered chairs.

"About nurses," said Presbury. "We can't trust anybody. Brierly can pose as a nurse. Will you stay on guard with us, Blagden?"

"Of course," replied the secretary.

Murdock, standing gloomily apart, suddenly inquired, "When will you perform the operation?"

"This afternoon. Then the embalmers can come on."

"The embalmers!" exclaimed he, startled and shuddering.

"To be sure, they'll know there's something

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wrong," replied Presbury. "But my reputation—and extra pay—will make them discreet. Besides, they're used to queer happenings. We'll get undertakers that deal only with the fashionable class of business. We must expect a good deal of gossip. It'll be whispered round that Berkeley died elsewhere; but what of that? Such things have been known to occur among respectable people—who, naturally, protect themselves from scandal and disgrace."

"You three had better get some sleep," said Murdock, moving wearily toward the outer door. He looked years older than his age. "When I come back, I'll ring four times slowly and you can unlock and let me in."

As the door closed behind him Brierly said: "Now what the devil is *he* up to?"

"He has probably returned to the house," suggested Blagden, "for a final look round to make sure everything is all right."

Presbury yawned twice, vastly and noisily. "You forget the other lady in this case," observed he, beginning to undress. "I don't envy him his job. . . . Murdock acts like a man who had a personal interest in stopping this scandal."

"Rather," said Blagden. "He and Berkeley were very fond of each other."

Presbury smiled. "I knew that. What I meant was that, no matter how strong a friendship is, it'd have to be supplemented with some selfish interest, to stir up a man's mind to think as quickly, as clearly, as resolutely as Murdock's has to-night. . . . Brierly, you and Blagden can have the range of the rest of this luxury and splendor. I'll sleep here." He gazed round the grandiose room. "Poor Berkeley! What

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pity, to have to leave it all, in the very prime of life." And Presbury threw back his head and yawned again.

"Well," said Brierly, echoing his chief's yawn, "I suppose everybody has to pay for what he gets in this world, some in one way, some in another."

"Stuff!" ejaculated Presbury. "If he'd been a pious, virtuous citizen, felled by a brick as he passed along the street, where'd your moral have been? His luck petered out—that's all. Gad, I never saw a better body — perfect, absolutely perfect — good for twenty years of young man's fun. Poor chap!" And he yawned once more.

XXIX

JESSIE AND FLORENCE

WITH dawn but an hour away, there were still open few resorts of the kind frequented by the fashionable Tenderloin set in which Berkeley had been a figure. "Jack's" was the second stop Murdock made; and at Jack's he found what he was seeking. The instant he entered the door he saw Viola, as pretty, as smartly dressed as two years before, and, in that kindly light at least, as freshly young; her cheeks were flushed from the champagne a stout, surly, provincial-looking man in awkward evening dress was providing for her party of two women and five men. At sight of Murdock, she half rose and fluttered a long slim arm—a not to be neglected chance to display to the entire crowded room the dozen or more fine rings with which her fingers were disfigured.

"Hello, stranger!" she cried, delighted, and quite forgetting how curtly he had rid himself of her by proxy.

Murdock shook hands, with a slight apologetic bow to the surly man at her right—one of those bows that recognize only to ignore.

"So you've come back?" said she, giving him a long, alluring look through half-closed eyes.

"Just for a glance. Where's Jessie?"

"You knew she and Berk quarreled?"

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"He told me."

"Do you come from him?"

"Yes."

"Then she *will* be glad to see you. She's sulking at home. She's stopping with me now. She closed up her place."

"I want to see her."

"Come round to-morrow afternoon. Here's one of my cards." She took from a white leather case in her resplendent gold bag a large square of bristol board perhaps a little too elegantly engraved.

"Thanks," said Murdock. And he nodded, bowed again to the surly man, passed on.

Viola did not wait until he was out of earshot before beginning to tell her sour Southerner follower who he was, how generous he was, why she had got rid of him—everything that would stimulate jealousy and interest and belief in her importance. By the shortest route among those crowded, mussy tables, he escaped from the close hot room, with its sickening, stale, stupefying smells of food, of drink, of tobacco, of perfumes fine and coarse. Within ten minutes he was descending at Viola's address, a house in West Sixty-seventh Street. He looked up at the windows—all dark. "But Viola's maid must be expecting her," he uttered. He ascended the steps; instead of ringing, he knocked. Through the curtain over the glass in the door he saw a colored maid come out from under the stairway. She opened to him, started back in astonishment before his somber, ominous countenance.

"Has something happened to Miss Viola?" she exclaimed, her mind searching for the likeliest among the various reasons for disaster in that turbulent life.

"No," Murdock reassured her. "I left her well

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and happy a few minutes ago. I wish to see Miss Jessie."

The maid looked at him doubtfully. It was a strange time of night for calling, even in the Tenderloin; but this handsome, fashionably dressed man, with many evidences of wealth to her expert eyes, was not to be abruptly denied.

"I must see her. I'm from Mr. Berkeley."

"Oh—from *him*." The maid brightened understandingly, but still held the door close.

"She's expecting me," continued Murdock, and he pushed a bill into her hand.

"You wake her, yo'self," said the maid, opening wide and standing aside. "She's feeling poorly these days, and *that* touchy! Jes' go upstairs—two flights—the door at the end of the hall in front. Don't *youse* tell her I let you in. Don't say *how* you got in."

"Has she been out this evening?"

"Lord, no. She ain't dressed for days. I ain't even seen her to-day. I don't go near her unless she calls down."

Murdock went up two flights, knocked at the indicated door. No answer. He knocked again. From within, a sleepy cross voice, "Go 'way, Vi. I won't talk to you to-night."

"It's I," said Murdock. "From Berk."

A long silence. He knocked again. "Let me in, please. You don't want me to call out my business, do you?"

Another pause; the sound of the key turning in the lock; then, after a full minute, "Come in!"

He entered. Unlike Viola, Jessie had the instinct for order strongly developed. The large, showily furnished bedroom was in perfect order—every article,

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very garment in its place. Beside the canopied brass double bed were two small bath slippers of pink silk. On the bed, resting upon her elbow and gazing at him was Jessie, in a pink silk nightgown, her hair carefully done and tied with a pink ribbon like an old maid who still dreams of the nuptial couch. At first glance she looked like a sick young woman; but as Murdock grew used to the dim light he saw that her eyes were haggard and deep sunk, and that the hard, bitter lines round her mouth were as vivid as they would be when they came to stay. He closed the door, locked it, seated himself near the bed in a slender gilt chair; over the back of it hung a pair of black silk stockings, turned inside out.

"You know why I've come," he began.

She eyed him defiantly. "Does he want me back?" she asked in a hard strained voice.

"He is dead."

She did not flinch; her wild, weary eyes looked straight into his.

"He is dead," repeated Murdock.

"You said that before." And she forced a sneering laugh.

Murdock could not but admire the iron nerves held thus taut by the instinct of self-preservation. "I spoke from what I know of you," continued he, "that you will help us hide the scandal. We have taken away his body. He will die at his hotel—of heart disease."

Her face relaxed as he spoke. When he ended, she sank back into the pillow, and her breath exhaled in a huge gust.

"I came to let you know, so that you'd say and do nothing foolish."

She began to mutter inarticulately. Her bosom

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heaved stormily; in a sort of convulsion her arms doubled up and her fingers wound themselves fiercely in her hair. Then through her set teeth the tempest burst. Sobs and groans, shrieks stifled with the palms of her hands or with the ends of the covers pressed against her face—a wild war of two personalities, one bent upon relief from agony of soul, the other on guard that in the paroxysms nothing incriminating might be revealed. Murdock watched in pitying silence until the storm began to abate. "That is all," he said. "I'll not disturb you longer."

"Wait! Wait!" she cried. "I want to speak. Wait!" And she hung half out of the bed to seize him by the coat. The nightdress slipped from her large, plump shoulders and bosom. "You think I did it on purpose. You think I'm all to the bad."

He disengaged himself gently. "I don't judge my fellow-beings," replied he, suddenly feeling for her—he knew not why—a kinship, a sympathy, even a comradeship in frailty. "The account was between you and him. It's none of my business."

"I went to frighten them. That was all. I swear, that was all! When he threw me back from her and called me those awful names, I— It went off—I don't know how. . . . I can't believe he's dead. . . . I loved him—yes, I did! He was a beast—you never will know. No man ever knows what another man is, with a woman—with a woman he's not ashamed of being himself before. But—I loved him. I don't know just how, but I did—I did! I'm glad he's dead—glad! Yes, I am. . . . He was done with me. He'd used me up, and I couldn't do anything to please him. I tried everything, and I guess I know about all the tricks of the trade. But he was tired of *me*. He was getting

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old and vicious—wanted youth—children. It's good he's dead. Now, no one else will have him. Yes, I'm glad—glad!—now that I ain't afraid. You don't know what I suffered when you said it wasn't Vi on the other side of the door. It was a thousand years of hell, in one minute. . . . No, don't go. Stay! I *must* talk to somebody about it. I can't talk to anybody else."

At this reminder of the proverbial looseness of tongue in women of her kind, Murdock reflected. He seated himself again. "If our plans should miscarry," he began slowly.

The change in her, the lightninglike change, was marvelous. Her hysteria disappeared. She sat up in the bed, threw aside the covers. One of her legs trailed, bare, toward the floor. Her hands, tightly interlocked, pressed deep into her soft breast. "Is there a chance of that?" she said, her voice calm, but such fright in her eyes that pity almost swerved him from the purpose prudence commanded.

"Always," replied he. "No plan can be perfect. I was about to say, if our plans miscarry, and you are arrested——"

She shut her teeth together with a snap.

"Arrested," he repeated, "send at once for Hinkley and Baum, the lawyers in the New York Life building. Send for them—and keep your mouth shut. We'll stand by you as long as there's any hope of suppressing the scandal. But not an instant longer. After that, you'll be prosecuted to the limit. Do you understand?"

She was sitting as stiff as if frozen.

"My advice to you," he went on, "is not to see anyone until your tendency to hysteria has passed."

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"I won't," replied she between her locked jaws.
"You can trust me."

"I rather think you don't care to sit in the—*electric chair*."

He paused; she shook in a violent chill, then was rigid again.

"Whenever," he went on, "you have a yearning to talk it over with some one, picture—the *electric chair*."

She was gray green. As if she had been shot, she fell back into the bed, covering her face with her arms. But that only made the vision the clearer; and so clear was it, so terrible, that while it persisted its terror would spare her the deeper horrors of remorse and the remoter peril of her soul. Murdock, satisfied now that his plans were in no danger from her hysterical desire to discuss her crime, went toward the door. A large closet was partly open; in it he saw an altar with several candles burning—and he knew what Jessie had been at, when he knocked. He departed, without her giving any further sign.

In the afternoon Mrs. Berkeley arrived from Washington accompanied by Berkeley's valet and her maid. Murdock, alone, met her at the door of the suite and took her into the drawing-room. She was calm, hardly more than serious, certainly not in the least grief-stricken. "How is he?" she asked.

"You must be prepared for the worst."

"I am," replied Florence. She was particularly youthful in a spring traveling dress just from Paris; her skin was still fresh from the treatment, and her hair, formerly too thin after the habit of fair hair when youth is past, was responding to a new treatment

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he had discovered. She was of those women who, from the nature of their skin and coloring, have at all times a cool, clean, fresh appearance. Her lips were thin and somewhat satiric; they and her light-gray eyes espoke—to the expert in temperaments—an individuality of strong passions and stronger will, sensual rather than sentimental—not unlike her husband, though everyone thought her his exact opposite. ‘What is ‘the worst’?’ inquired she, seating herself and in tranquil, leisurely fashion, divesting herself of gloves. As he did not reply, she presently glanced at him, read the truth in his face. She hastily lowered her eyes.

“He is dead.”

She paused in taking off the second glove. ‘Dead,’ she repeated. She gazed thoughtfully into space. After a minute’s silence, “Disgracefully?”

“We got him away.” Murdock’s eyes turned toward the closed bedroom door. “He’s in there. We plan to announce his death some time during the afternoon. He will die after an operation.”

She resumed unbuttoning the second glove; when it was off, she laid the two gloves neatly together, put them in her lap and slowly turned the sets of her superb rings outward. “As you please. Perhaps it is best that there be no scandal. Such things set a bad example to the middle class, who are mad about imitating us, especially our vices.” She sat reflecting, a slight satiric smile about her lips. A handsome woman, but of that superior “queenly” style which plain men think too grand for the homely uses of daily life.

“You will see him?”

She seemed to debate, balancing reasons for and against.

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"He looks quite natural—now."

"I do not wish to see him; so, why should I? I need make no pretenses with you. You know about all there is to be known. He cared for no one but himself, and no one cared for him. I used often to think that, if I loved him, I should kill him."

Murdock, his nerves all but exhausted, startled. She saw, and said, "It was a woman, was it?" Taking Murdock's silence as assent, she went on. "There's a certain justice in that. If we believed in special providences, we'd say this was an instance of it."

His face darkened. He knew Tom Berkeley through and through; yet it seemed to him that death was a quitter of all scores, that she owed it to herself, if not to her husband's memory, to feel, or at least to show some softness. When he looked at her again, her gaze was resting upon him.

"I see," said she, "you think me hard. I am only honest. Of course, I shall pretend before the world; I shall do what is expected. But I tell you frankly I feel only relief. You cannot understand. You'd have had to live with him as a woman lives with a man. I thank God I had the insight and the courage to bear no children to him."

"All that is past," said Murdock gently.

"I wish it were! But it is not. It lives in me. We are what association makes us, and I associated with him." She struck her hands together with sudden violence, and her eyes flashed. "He blighted my youth. He withered my heart. To stand up against him, I had to become more or less like him. . . . Not in one respect, thank God. He made me loathe the very thought of sex."

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She calmed as quickly as she had burst into storm. "I do not hate him," said she. "He was what nature made him. Please don't think I'm ungrateful for what you're doing to spare me and to prevent his tombstone from being a monument of shame."

"The least I could do was to try to carry out his last wish. Besides—" He hesitated, yielded to his aversion to pose—"scandal would have been unpleasant for me, just now. There's always a personal reason for one's acts."

"But with most people the personal reason is the only one—and so offensively personal!"

Murdock recognized another sentence in the wife's parting words over the husband. "You will stop in this hotel, as I've arranged?"

"Yes. As soon as I'm settled, I'll send my maid out to get my crape. I'll swathe myself so that the proprieties will be more than satisfied." She drew a long, slow breath. "My term is served. The prison doors are open. I am *free*!"

She went to the window and gazed out over the sparkling city with ravished eyes, as if she had conquered it and it lay at her feet, humbly awaiting her good pleasure. The air of the room became stifling to Murdock, and he was ashamed of the sympathy within that welled up in him. "Free!" he repeated to himself exaltingly. "I, too, shall soon be free." Moving toward the door, he said, "I'll have your maid sent to you in about half an hour. I'll tell her he has just died."

"Thank you." As his hand was on the knob, she asked, "Did he have time to make a will?"

"No."

"That is fortunate for me." And her head reared

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proudly. Under the laws of their State all he had was hers.

Murdock went to the death chamber by way of the private hall. Dr. Presbury had just gone. Blagden and Brierly were lunching in great comfort and cheer in an adjoining room, as Murdock saw through its open door. He stood by the bed, gazed down at the corpse, straight now, and with the mouth tied shut. Death had departed from those features, taking with it the sinister expression; the face wore a look of stony calm. It was the face the world had always seen—the generous, good-natured, light-hearted Berk who so well concealed his icy selfishness from the casual by not concealing it at all. “Dead!” muttered Murdock, and his gaze rested upon that long, humorous, piglike nose—all its humor and its suggestion of jovial sensuality gone now. How it had loved the odors of the “good things of life”—of food, of cigars, of wine—of woman. But it would twitch at their tickling no more. “Dead!” muttered his friend, and for the first time the meaning of the crowding events of the past twelve hours, the facts of violence, of murder, of himself and the others as accomplices, thrust at him vividly. But he was not moved; the element of tragedy was lacking.

His face grew somber, but not with grief, or regret, even; the gloomy thought was of himself—that after a few more of these swift revolving years he, too, would be stretched out like this, the world going on just the same, and he dead and disintegrating and forgotten. His life had been too occupied with the immediate and the pressing, to admit the thought of death; to-morrow he would be again too busy. But in that hour he thought of it; and it seemed to him the

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only fact in life not too evanescent and futile to be worthy a thought. "Dead!" he said. "I must make haste to live!"

Blagden joined him. "Shall we announce it, sir?" he asked. "And shall we send for the undertaker?"

Murdock nodded assent.

"I assume you wish me to make arrangements for her—as to burial, and all that?"

"Yes," said Murdock. "Tell her the programme. She'll carry it out."

XXX

THE STORM BURSTS

BLAGDEN, just arrived at the Eyrie from Chicago and Murdock, was at one of the long windows of Sophy's sitting room, composing himself for what he hoped was the final crisis in his enterprise. Berkeley had been underground a fortnight; there had been published no hint of the truth about either his life or his death. But the whispered scandal had traveled, swift and stealthy as serpent under forest carpet of fallen leaves, until the whole country was half believing there was "something mighty queer in that fellow Berkeley's death," and that probably Charles Murdock knew more about it than he cared—or dared—to have the public learn. Blagden, hoping against common sense that Murdock would not realize, had been anxiously awaiting the announcement of the divorce; for if Murdock should suspect the state of the public mind he would surely postpone the announcement, might even abandon the divorce altogether. That morning, as soon as he entered Murdock's suite at the Auditorium, Murdock had dashed out hope by starting him for Saint X with an abrupt: "See Mrs. Murdock and tell her the decree will not be published at present. Then see Wickham and confirm the telegram I have just sent, instructing him to put it off."

Sophy kept him waiting less than half an hour—just time to put on the new-model Agnes corset, with the

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Fleury elastic, and to have her hair hastily done in the graceful fashion Miss Fleury had taught Katy. "I didn't stop to dress," she began, as she swept in robed in flowing lace and chiffon, artfully draped to decrease and harmonize her proportions. "I've been ill all day." Evidently she was laboring under great excitement. She thrust a newspaper at him—a copy of the New York *News-Record*. "Some one—I haven't dared ask who—left this in my dressing room. Have you seen it?"

Blagden read:

One of the many explanations of the occurrences of a certain tragic night is that the deceased Western millionaire and an associate, even more conspicuous in the same trust, were rival admirers of the young lady in question. It is said that they met at the house hired for her by one of them. Neither expected to see the other; a quarrel followed, and the one shot the other, so the story goes. It is known that he who is said to have done the shooting has been in strained relations with his wife for some time, with persistent rumors of divorce pending. Like so many of our newly sprung very rich he has wearied of the wife of his youth, though she is still young and attractive and by no means so lacking in education and social graces as have been many of the women whose husbands have paid them off and dismissed them.

Blagden glanced at the date—the previous morning; this, then, was what had moved Murdock to post him off to Saint X. "I'm sorry!" he exclaimed, lifting his ostentatiously shocked gaze to Sophy's angry countenance. "You shouldn't have seen this *miserable* story."

"Who was the woman, Mr. Blagden? Tell me! Was it—*she*?"

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"I may not talk about it, my dear friend," he replied, apparently deeply embarrassed, but firm and dignified. "What good can come of discussing it?"

Sophy tossed her head. "Yes, yes—it *was* she! Your manner is confession." She was pacing up and down in fury; she would have sat, but even the Fleury improvement did not make sitting easy. "Thank God, I'm free—*free!* All has been settled. I can do as I please. I'll see that she gets her deserts! I'll have her shouted from the housetops."

"You certainly can ruin them both," admitted Blagden. "And, after all you've suffered, it would be just. . . . But, what I am saying? You've made me forget why I'm here—my duty to him. He sent me to ask you for—for mercy." He faltered; his expression was a tribute to his manhood which he was outraging, as he went on: "He wants you to consent to a postponement. . . . He wants you to give the scandal time to die." It took all the energy of his hungry passion and hungrier ambition to nerve him to utter that last sentence, the cap of the structure of passive chicane he had thought out with the assistance of conscience and a high sense of honor.

Sophy laughed viciously. "Not a day. No, not an hour!"

She rushed to the telephone table, plumped herself down resolutely, called the Country Club. Blagden watched in silence. Her bosom was heaving and her head twitching. In her impatience she several times jerked at the receiver hook. "Is Mrs. Monfort there? Or Mrs. Hastings? Or Mrs. Dorsey? Please tell one of them Mrs. Murdock wishes to speak to her, *right away.*"

Blagden felt it was safe to let conscience interrupt with a mild, "I beg you, Mrs. Murdock——"

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"They can't make a cat's-paw of me! . . . Is that you, Mrs. Monfort? . . . Yes? . . . Yes, it's Sophy Murdock. I just called you up, Jane, to let you know I've got my divorce. . . . Why should you be surprised? . . . Well, I couldn't suffer in silence any longer. . . . I thank my God I've escaped before this frightful scandal burst. . . . No, not at all. I wouldn't injure my children by naming anyone. . . . Yes, the same woman, Juliet Raeburn. . . . Why, certainly, you do. Dangerfield, you know. . . . Yes, that dressmaker—that's her. . . . No, no, I've told you more than I should. Be careful what you say, Jane. Of course, I don't care who knows about the divorce. That's a public matter. . . . No, not this morning. I'm almost prostrated. But come to lunch to-morrow. . . . Good-by. . . . Yes—yes— You are so good and true. It's in times like these that one finds their real friends. . . . I know *you*, Jane. . . . Good-by!"

Sophy hung up the receiver. "There!" cried she. "That's my answer. You can take it to him—to *him*!"

The face of the young man was gray, and he had to steady his lips several times before he was able to articulate, "Well—it's out!"

"Out?" cried Sophy jubilantly. "Rather! Why, Jane Monfort will talk it and write it and telegraph it." Her laugh and her glittering eyes suggested insanity. "They're welcome to marry now. He's welcome to his loose, frivolous wife. How happy they will be!"

Blagden let her rave on and on. It was full a quarter of an hour before she subsided, heaving, her face shining with perspiration, her breath coming in gasps, so ill suited to the expression of violent emotions were summer weather and the Agnes corset. A purplish

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band appeared upon her forehead and her cheeks became leaden. But Blagden, as absorbed as a chronic chess player in his next move, was not observing her. When the silence had attracted her attention to him he rose dejectedly. "Good-by," said he, mournfully extending his hand. "I shall probably not see you again."

She gazed at him in stupefied alarm. He had dressed himself with the greatest care for that interview. Never before had she seen him so fascinatingly the man of the fashionable world. "What do you mean?" she entreated, her thoughts now entirely concentrated upon him.

"I'm returning to Chicago," replied he, his eyes on hers in lingering sadness. "I shall resign at once. Then—back to New York—abroad perhaps—to try to forget."

"You're not going to *desert* me—just when I really need you!" It burst upon her how alone she was. Norma would certainly disapprove what she had done—the cyclone of foul scandal she had released—and so, too, would her son probably. Her energy, her courage were ebbing like a tide racing out through a strait. "You wouldn't do that!" she implored. "You wouldn't be so cruel—to me!" And tears gathered in her limpid azure eyes.

He looked down at her eagerly. "Do you really mean it?" he asked. "If I could believe you valued my friendship!"

"Who else have I got? I'm all alone. And now that I have a fortune I'll be beset on every side. I had hoped that when you resigned *we* could—could—make some arrangement."

Blagden stared at her dumfounded. Here, what he

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expected to have to maneuver for was frankly offered him, was pressed upon him. She had always been a great figure in his imagination—she, dwelling perpetually in the atmosphere of gold that appealed to his perfectly normal romantic instincts. Now, herself very rich, a queen in her own right, even were she plain instead of handsome, it would have been as impossible for him to see defect in her as for the South Sea islander to find ugliness in the hideous idol he adores. Temper became goddesslike wrath; fat was dignity; her most commonplace remark shimmered with gold, and her voice tinkled with it. In his imagination she was the summit of heart's desire. Nor was it illusion or delusion. The world is to each of us what his own eyes and his own mind reveal to him; Blagden's world was that of most human beings, red in the sordid sycophantic traditions of the race, as a world of things, not of persons; beauty and dignity and power and rank were represented to him under the material form of wealth. Had his shrewdness not warned him that women, like men, become unmanageable once they got the sense of power, or even the scent of it in their nostrils, he would have lost all by showing how much in awe of her he was, how this gracious condescension of hers had overwhelmed him. He hastily concealed his emotion; and very manly and frank and ardent he looked as he said: "Any arrangement that enables me to be near you, to feel that I am helping you—will be—will make me content—" His eyes lit with passion—more than content."

Her gaze dropped before his ardor, and a blush of confusion and pleasure came to her cheeks. "I was afraid of him, and I stood out for absolute control of—of my property. I want some one to look after my affairs," said she. "I must have some one." The blush

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deepened. "I thought perhaps—for the present—we might have some such arrangement as—as you now have."

"For the present," replied he. His tone was bold and full of meaning. "But only for the present."

"That is what I meant," she murmured. And very youthful she felt and looked.

A knock at the door; Katy entered. "Mrs. Berkeley to see you, ma'am. She says she must."

Sophy frowned. "Show her up," was her not very gracious assent. To Blagden: "Poor Florence! I can't deny her. No, you must stay. You must. I guess we both know what she's come for."

Fashionable mourning was most becoming to Mrs. Berkeley; her soft, somber draperies seemed to diffuse about her stately fair comeliness the pensive, serene allurements of twilight. "Sophy," she began, not seeing Blagden who had withdrawn to the deep window casement, "what is this dreadful story I've just heard?"

"About my divorce? It's quite true. But you needn't condole. I'm as glad of my release as—as *you* were."

"No—no!" exclaimed Florence. "I don't mean the divorce." There she caught sight of Blagden. She bowed to him, hesitated.

"You can speak quite freely before Mr. Blagden," said Sophy.

Florence gave him a queer, searching look that made his sensitive skin flush, then went on: "Jane Monfort just telephoned me that you got your divorce because—Oh, I understood. She was hinting at that miserable lie about a quarrel between Berkeley and Murdock—a quarrel over a woman."

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"It is not a lie, Florence," said Sophy. Her tone was restrained, but the line of her mouth straightened.

"Sophy!" cried Mrs. Berkeley. "You surely didn't believe! Mr. Blagden, tell her the truth about it."

"I know nothing," replied Blagden calmly. "Mr. Murdock did not take me into his confidence."

Mrs. Berkeley looked astonished, puzzled. But Blagden's expression was convincing. "Well, *I* know," she went on, turning to Sophy. "My husband was shot by a woman—and your husband——"

"He is *not* my husband," interjected Sophy. "I am free, thank God!"

"Mr. Murdock, then—he moved heaven and earth to hide the scandal."

"The woman was Juliet Raeburn."

"That's what Jane said. Sophy, it isn't true. It was a—cocotte."

"It was," flashed Sophy. "Indeed, it was!"

"Juliet Raeburn comes of a splendid family. She's a well-bred woman, of the highest reputation."

Sophy trembled with rage. "Hear her, Mr. Blagden!" she cried mockingly. "Just hear her! Who has been deceiving you, Florence? I tell you, your husband was shot by Murdock in a quarrel about that Raeburn woman, his mistress. And I want the whole world to know it."

"Sophy, some one has been horribly deceiving you." he appealed to Blagden, who was alternately paling and flushing. "Mr. Blagden!" She tried to fix his wandering gaze but could not. "Tell her the truth, Mr. Blagden."

"Really, Mrs. Berkeley," replied he restlessly, "you must excuse me. My position with Mr. Murdock makes it impossible for me to take part in such a dis-

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cussion. All I know about the alleged murder is that Mr. Murdock told me Mr. Berkeley died of heart disease. Of Miss Raeburn I know nothing."

"Do you pretend that *you* believe Murdock killed my husband?" demanded Mrs. Berkeley sternly.

"I do not," replied Blagden. "I believe it is not true. I have told Mrs. Murdock so."

"Yes, and what's his authority?" cried Sophy. "Why, it's the same as yours—Murdock, himself." She laughed insanely. "Poor Florence! You thought Murdock was toiling to shield you. Instead, he was shielding himself and that woman. No wonder he didn't come out to the funeral."

"O Sophy, Sophy! How can you!" pleaded Mrs. Berkeley.

"Maybe the Raeburn woman did do the shooting," conceded Sophy. "What does it matter which did it? It was one or the other."

"Ridiculous! Did *you* tell Jane that story?"

"I did not," replied Sophy, with the defiance of the teller of half-truths. "She knew it already."

"But you did not deny it to her."

"I am done with lies, Florence. For years I've been living a lie, and eating my heart out. Now, I'm going to live in the open."

"Sophy," said Mrs. Berkeley solemnly, "you are countenancing the spread of a frightful, a dangerous falsehood. I don't know anything about your relations with your husband. God knows, I wouldn't judge between any husband and wife, after what I had at home. But one thing I can say—Murdock was my husband's friend through his life, and showed his friendship most after he was dead."

"How do you know that?" asked Sophy scornfully.

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Mrs. Berkeley was silent.

"Only because Murdock told you!"

"No," replied Florence with such energy that Blagden startled. "I know it by a thousand and one small circumstances that convince me beyond a doubt. As for Juliet Raeburn being in any way entangled in this, it is preposterous."

Sophy shot her a glance of sullen dislike.

"I see you don't believe me," Florence went on. "You are bent on revenge. Well, have it—stuff yourself with it. But, Sophy, let me warn you. Be careful not to go too far. If you press this lie it will be revealed as a lie, and your revenge will recoil upon your own head. I know Murdock is innocent of Berkeley's death. If you spread a report that he murdered him the truth will come out. And you will be covered with humiliation and disgrace. Instead of sympathy from everybody you will get universal condemnation."

Sophy sniffed contemptuously. But she made no verbal answer, because she was impressed; perhaps she had gone a little too far with Jane Monfort. Presently he said, in a mollifying tone: "Well, Florence, don't let us quarrel. You can believe what you please, and so can I. For my part, I'm going to try to forget Murdock ever lived. If anyone asks me about the business I'm going to refuse to discuss it."

"That is wise. Don't you think so, Mr. Blagden?"

The secretary came from the deep window to which he had again discreetly withdrawn. "Certainly, the world always admires a woman who, no matter what her provocation, keeps silent about her husband," said he, with the precision of one repeating a carefully rehearsed speech. "Even if the truth about Mr. Berkeley's death were different from what the public believes, Mr. Mur-

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dock is not the man to conceal such a truth without taking all precautions to protect his version of it."

"You hear, Sophy," cried Florence. "You must admit, that's common sense."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Sophy, rolling her fine, innocent eyes and waving her beautiful hands. "Why do you attack *me*? I know what I know, I believe what I believe; but I've not *said* anything. I intend to keep my mouth shut. Only, I shall tell no lies."

And with that Mrs. Berkeley had to be content. After she was gone Blagden said: "As she was talking it occurred to me that Presbury and the two other doctors, who have pledged their reputations to the story that Berkeley died of heart disease, might make trouble. It would be disagreeable, wouldn't it, if they were to sue some paper or person for slander? Besides, Mr. Murdock is very resourceful. It isn't wise to stir him up too much, don't you think?"

"I've done all I'm going to do," replied Sophy. "That woman will be exposed, and I don't care about anything else."

Blagden admired the shrewdness behind this remark. "She'll have every wife in the country enlisted on her side," reflected he. "And, if I know anything about American women, the wives will see to it that the husbands roar."

The waiter who brought Murdock's breakfast next morning laid the newspapers before him and watched his face with the eager curiosity of the humble about the exalted. On the first page of each of those papers, with headlines varying from three to six columns in width, was the great Murdock divorce scandal; and on the top of the heap he had put the one newspaper

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which ventured darkly to hint a connection between the divorce and the "unexplained mystery of millionaire Berkeley's death," and to inject—very guardedly—insinuations about Juliet Raeburn—"a beautiful young woman, known to every woman in the land who wears fashionable dress, is said to be responsible for breaking up the once happy Murdock home."

Murdock's glance fell upon the screaming headlines. The waiter was rewarded; his thin, inquisitive nose worked and his dull prominent eyes glistened, as with a curse Murdock took up the paper. As he opened it he saw a picture—the palace occupied by Dangerfield's. His eyes tore through headlines and story. Simcox entered, saw the waiter feasting upon Murdock's telltale expression, motioned him from the room with a gesture that was at once a blow and a kick, then himself retired as noiselessly as he had come. Murdock read on and on—grains of truth buried in masses of conjecture, speculations, lies; basest attacks upon himself and upon Juliet Raeburn so advanced that any attempt to refute them would seem an admission of their partial truth; his wife lauded—a beautiful, noble woman, of too lofty a nature for his coarseness; the fiction of his depravity, finally goaded to desperation by infidelities flaunted in her very face. Saint X was in the date line of the main story; but without that, he knew it must have been in Saint X, from Sophy or her friends, that the reporters had got most of the statements.

Murdock had used newspaper publicity too often, had studied it too carefully, not to know what he was now facing. From Atlantic to Pacific, wherever there was interest in scandal the main subject of conversation, not alone among the men, but among the women

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as well, was the great Murdock explosion. And Charles Murdock, sitting there alone, so high up that even the noise of the granite-paved city came as a murmur, knew he was at the very moment pilloried before the stares and sneers and scorn of eighty millions. But he was not thinking of himself. The thought that drove reason from its seat was of the woman unjustly pilloried beside him—the woman on whom he had brought infinite disgrace. In his reckless passion, in his insolent confidence in the power of his wealth, he had neglected the wisdom in one of his favorite maxims: “You can bribe anybody, but not everybody”—and had imagined he could keep even the breath of scandal from touching her. Now, there she lay, stricken down, trampled, torn, befouled, and all because he had been an arrogant, head-long fool. He flung away the paper, bent his head upon his clenched fists and groaned and gnashed his teeth.

What should he do? What *could* he do? To speak about her was to convince the public of her guilt, was to inflame and encourage those attacking her; to defend a woman's reputation is to admit it needs defending. He paced the floor; he smote his temples until his head seemed about to blow open. His fury was terrible as a tempest-goaded sea's assault upon a rocky coast—and as futile. Insane with helpless rage he raved against the hopeless, immutable facts of her plight, like a child beating its bare hands upon the stone against which it has clumsily fallen. Simcox entered; he was horror-stricken at sight of Murdock's foam-flecked lips and twisted features and wildly rolling, bloodshot eyes. “Beg pardon, sir,” said he in his usual solemn, monotonous tones, “but here's a letter from Mr. Blagden. He telegraphed me to see that you *got it at once.*”

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Simcox, monotonous and matter of fact, took him off his guard. Before he realized what he was doing, he had taken the note, had torn it open, was reading:

SIR :

As you will doubtless know before you get this, my mission was a failure. I did all I could to dissuade Mrs. Murdock, though it was against my conscience to do so.

I herewith tender my resignation, to take effect at once.

I have the honor to be, etc.,

MELVILLE BLAGDEN.

He crumpled the note and cast it from him. In itself, it had made not the faintest impression; but the interruption, slight though it was, yet gave his reason the chance to rally and reassert control. With him, to think was to think intelligently, and to think intelligently was to act. "Wait!" he commanded, as Simcox moved to withdraw. Then, after a few seconds, "Have my car attached to the first train for New York. No. Have them make it up in a special to go at once."

Next morning's newspapers, east and west, led off their great second day instalment of the scandal with flaming announcement that Murdock was rushing to New York by special train. As it steamed into the Grand Central station, reporters swarmed round the steps of the private car. Murdock, youthful, handsome, carefully dressed, audacious, appeared upon the platform. He surveyed the group of agents of publicity with a calm, cynical smile. Just behind them stood Viola Hastings, "got up regardless," as she would have put it. Her small, delicate, roguish face was

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all smiles. Murdock descended, pushed through the crowd, took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I told you I'd be free within a year," cried he, loudly enough for all to hear. "I win by four days."

One of the reporters recognized Viola, whispered excitedly to the others. "We came," said one frank-faced youth, edging up to Murdock, "because of the talk about you and your wife. But it seems to be false." And he bowed to Viola as if he thought she were Mrs. Murdock.

"This is not my *late* wife," said Murdock, apparently highly amused. "This is a very dear friend of mine."

He took Viola's arm with affectionate familiarity; they walked down the platform to his waiting carriage, he seeming to enjoy as much as did she the glances of amazement, horror, indignation, shot at them from every side, as they pushed through the crowd.

The whole country rang with Murdock's shameless immorality, his studied insolence to public decency. Every newspaper described at length the scene at the station, how several fashionable hotels had turned away the "guilty couple" openly applying for accommodations; how they "finally found shelter in the Hastings woman's establishment on the west side."

"Are you mad, Murdock? Are you mad?" cried Langdon, his chief ally in finance, who hunted him out that morning. "You have made yourself an outcast. Yes, you must be quite mad. I've known men to lose their heads about women, many's the time. But, by God, nothing like this. And you're the last man on earth I'd have suspected."

"A fool at forty is a fool indeed," quoth Murdock. "You see, Mowbray, I didn't sow my wild oats

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n season. These out-of-season crops are always difficult and costly."

"I hope it's true you're taking her abroad to-morrow."

"Yes."

"Still, the mischief's done. You've contributed more to stir up the unruly masses against the upper class than all the financial scandals together."

"Hypocrites," jeered Murdock.

"Of course. But how does that help matters? You'd much better have outraged public virtue than public hypocrisy. Outraged virtue has a certain humility and meekness; but an outraged hypocrisy is an appeasable raging lion."

Murdock listened with a faint, pleased smile. "Get out and roar with the rest, old man," counseled he. If you don't heave your brick and heave it hard, you'll be under suspicion."

"Mad! Quite mad!"

"As for my flaunting the vices of the rich—my dear Langdon, vice is human; riches simply do not rob a man of that part of human nature, though they do trip him of most other human qualities. Tell me, what the hell's the use of having power if one can't use it as he pleases?"

"Mad! Quite mad! Thank God, you're getting out of the country."

Murdock's eyes flashed. "That's my one regret. I'd like to stay and amuse myself with my hypocritical countrymen."

He and "the woman for whom he had wrecked his home" sailed away at dawn the next morning. And his heart was for the moment as light as hers; for it had been published broadcast: "The Hastings woman,

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who has been Murdock's friend the past two or three years, was prior to that employed for a time in Dangerfield's, the woman's establishment built up by the genius of Miss Juliet Raeburn. It was through the fact of this employment of the Hastings woman that many were led into grave misapprehension regarding the Murdock divorce."

XXXI

MR. BLAGDEN PLAYS TRUMPS

INSTEAD of enjoying the cyclone which, originating in the tiny swirl of gossip at Saint X's Country Club, was raging the length and breadth of the land, Sophy hid herself and peered out at it in amazement, in terror, and in anger. Her amazement was that of the sherman who, merely uncorking a washed-up bottle, saw issue from it a vast and awful monster that overpread sea and land and obscured the heavens. Her error was even greater than her wonder; for she, by nature retiring and shy, was all in a twinkling whisked from privacy to be exploited in print to the minutest details of her routine of life. But anger soon distanced amazement and even terror. In the press, in the pulpit, among her friends, to make Murdock's infamy the blacker, to point homily, and to barb jeremiad, she was represented as the faded faithful wife, whom mercy should have constrained him to endure, though inclination had fled and the strong chains of duty to his children and dread of public opinion were not strong enough to bind. He was condemned; but she—she was commiserated. "Poor thing!—still, what could she expect?" It gave her a sensation of acute nausea to see such phrases as "noble patient wife," and "motherly." "*I don't look motherly!*" she smiled miserably at a very motherly looking picture

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of her in one of the newspapers. "Or, if I do, I'll see that I get over it. Why, I'm a young woman yet. I'll show them!"

Thus, though Murdock's inspiration of insolence completely turned suspicion from the one person she had sought to reach and overwhelm, so occupied was she with her own woes that she accepted it as merely another, and by no means the largest or bitterest drop in her brimming cup of bitterness. She shut herself away, even excluding Charley and Norma, to get what consolation she might from discussing with tactful and stanch Blagden all aspects of her troubles, all phases of Murdock's wickedness—and, also, the disposition of the wealth that was now hers. She was not mercenary; in fact, she had no more than her share of woman's instinctive thrift. But she was human. It was irritating to her that the gossips were greatly underestimating the amount she had got in the settlement. She began to hint to Blagden to correct the misstatements going the round of the newspapers.

"Perhaps," said he. "Let's think it over."

He had learned from Murdock never to make an important move on impulse. He was glad of his caution when he bethought him that anything which tended to increase Sophy's importance and value in the public mind just then would increase his own difficulties. "Why," reflected he, "she'd immediately be surrounded by a swarm of flatterers and fortune hunters."

"On consideration," replied he, when she brought the matter up again, "don't you think you'd be giving Murdock's friends a good weapon?"

"What do you mean?" asked she, alarmed.

"They would harp on his generosity to you. As if you were not entitled to all he gave, and more! But

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you've learned how the world is." Then, seeing that he had convinced her, he added: "Of course, I may be mistaken. If you wish, I'll see that the exact amount is announced."

"No! No!" she cried. She was appalled by the blunder she had thought of committing. "What ever would become of me without you! I do believe these low hypocrites would have made a hero of him and would have attacked me openly."

"I fear they would," said Blagden.

She gave him a look of deep admiration. "How clever you are! How fortunate *I* am!"

Murdock's ability, being beyond her and exercised wholly outside her sphere, had made slight and hazy impression; but Blagden's shrewdness was within her range, was exhibited in her own intimate affairs. "How lucky I am!" she repeated, half to herself.

Blagden thrilled. Our opinion of anyone depends chiefly upon whether our point of view is sympathetic or the reverse. The finest human character cannot withstand criticism; and the worst has charms for him or her who is determined to see charm. It was no hypocrisy, no effort, for Blagden to fall deeply, disinterestedly in love with Sophy. She felt that he appreciated her; she, therefore, showed him the best side of her nature, took care to dress herself becomingly for his benefit, responded to the stimulus of his admiration, began to long to live up to his very human and livable deal of her. And he set about realizing his ambition to make her better and still better, especially to bring out the physical charms that had been hers and were still hers, though in partial adipose eclipse. He was most adroit, managed her so deferentially that, while flattering her vanity into assuring her he thought her

perfect, he stirred her common sense to show her how she could be what he thought her. She took walks with him, long walks, and finally climbs; she hunted out and adopted the diet Schulze had once prescribed. She reëstablished Secor's long-neglected beauty regimen brought from New York a masseuse recommended by him, to teach and to assist Katy. And, as she was still to the youthful side of youthful forty, and had by inheritance both constitution and vitality, the results were what might have been expected. The health she had got in her youth of out-door farm life reasserted itself in all its age- and decay-defying vigor. Complexion became clear, wonderfully white, radiant; adipose envelope melted; hips shrank toward modester sightliness; her natural body, her natural arms, and legs and throat were soon reëmerging, and in her face the eyes and the fine delicate nose began to dominate instead of cheeks. Never had love—the love that inspires—wrought his miracles more quickly or more beautifully.

“Dear me, how well you're looking, Sophy!” said Mrs. Monfort, just returned from Europe and meeting her at the Country Club several months after the great scandal had burst and vanished. “You've got your figure back, haven't you? You really don't look a day over thirty-five.”

Sophy winced, as Mrs. Monfort had intended. “Well, you know I am seven years younger than you, Jane,” she answered, with the genuine sweetness of satisfaction in a thrust parried and returned. “Now that my mind is free, I'm beginning to be myself.”

Mrs. Monfort smiled the smile that invites confidences. “Then, too, my dear,” said she, “there's nothing like falling in love for freshening a woman up.

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late Dorsey says she has a love affair regularly every five years, just as a tonic."

Sophy's cheeks flamed. - So *that* was the latest gossip! A love affair between her and Blagden! Her expression was so forbidding that Jane Monfort, prying though she was under pretense of a joyous and frank interest in the affairs of her friends, did not dare pursue the subject. A day or so later it was Charley. He looked after Blagden riding away on a hack Sophy had bought him when she got one for herself. "Gad, mother," said he sourly, "that chap's giving himself no end of airs. He acts as if he were master here."

"Mr. Blagden is manager here," replied his mother. "He has absolute authority. And very grateful I am. I'd not be able to get on without him."

Charley, convinced by the flatteries of servants and sycophants on that he was a person of force and genius, competent to the most abstruse matters without need of experience, proceeded to unburden himself in discharge of his duty as head of the family. "I tell you candidly, mother," said he, "the thing doesn't look well. Of course, I understand how it is. I know you regard Blagden as simply a useful employee. But people will talk. You forget he may misunderstand our courtesy. I haven't a doubt he has his eye on our fortune."

Charley was even more unfortunate than usual here. His mother bridled, as any woman must at the suggestion that her charms are not sufficient to account for her fascination. "You attend to your own business! If it hadn't been for Mr. Blagden, I'd have taken you out of Yale and put you in Tecumseh this fall."

"Tecumseh!" Into his accent the young man con-

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centrated all the alarm and repulsion which filled him at the suggestion of his going to a college where all the students were compelled to work their way through and to live on what they made by their own efforts in the college's mines, factories, farms, and stores.

"Your sister says it'd make a man of you. But Mr. Blagden insists it's better for you to get the education of a gentleman, among gentlemen. And he begged me not to cut down your allowance. But I haven't made my mind up about that yet."

Charley lapsed into sulky silence. He said no more against Blagden, was on the contrary most affable to him. "At least redney's well born and well bred," reflected he—he was rapidly expanding into a rare flower of Eastern culture. "And the only reason he isn't in our class is his lack of money. He's doing a grand work, coaching mother up to the responsibilities of our social position. Even if he has the impudence of thinking of marrying her, she's got pride enough to put him in his place."

But now it was Blagden's turn. He had been in high spirits, laughing, jesting, giving the Eyrie an atmosphere of brightness it had never had in all its dismal history as the mausoleum of the elder Dumont, the prison of John Dumont's wife, and the scene of the downfall of the family life of the Murdock's. He had had Sophy awake and alert all the time, both talking and listening, and in the best spirits. There was herself to talk about and to be talked about hours on hours. And, for change, there was Murdock as a topic—an inexhaustible vein of conversation, that; enough to last a long lifetime, enough in itself to form the closest bond between them. All at once, this spring of gayety and life and interest became dry. Blagden

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grew silent, murky, morose even. He avoided Sophy, was distant with her, made a great show of respecting their relations of secretary and employer. Sophy accused Charley of having offended him, but the young man stoutly denied this.

"I like him," said he. "And I think he's the best possible helper for you. Look how he keeps up the house and grounds. Why, there's no place in Saint X that looks anywhere near so well as ours. And it's his doing. What an air these hydrangeas give the approach to the house!"

Sophy now felt that her instinct's reading must be correct. But she could not summon the courage to speak out to him directly, so deep was her humility about herself in the comparison with him. The solid virtues put one at ease; but the showy virtues, where they impress at all, dazzle and awe. Blagden's dress, his aristocratic air, his reserve under a surface of engaging simplicity and frankness— Sophy fell to coloring and inwardly quaking at sight of him, but speak she could not.

In truth, Blagden's mood was different from what she imagined, from what he himself imagined. As soon as he saw he had the game in his own hands, he permitted conscience to begin to reproach him for his far from creditable aids to fate in bringing about the divorce and the improvement in his own prospects. When the hour for action strikes, the man who guides his life by the code of success puts conscience and sympathy and all the gentle feelings to the rear, as an army its women before battle. But when the action is over and the success won, the gentler considerations are once more admitted. There is a time for ruthless action; there is a time for repentance. Blagden, now that repentance

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could do his plans no harm, was deeply and sincerely repentant.

"I don't deserve her," he said to himself funereally. "Of course, all's fair in love—and I loved her, and I was working for her happiness. Still, I wish to God it hadn't been necessary to do some of the things I had to do. If I should win her finally I must make amends. Never again will I do anything anybody could misconstrue into rascality—yes, rascality!" And he felt he was indeed doing heavy penance, when he laid upon his aristocratic sensitiveness the lash of that base word.

Day after day he persisted in this penitential mood, the more resolutely because its outward manifestations were obviously helping his plans along. At last he decided he could afford the luxury of an honest attempt at complete renunciation; as Sophy's eyes were full of pathetic appeal every time they met his he felt he could get full credit with his conscience, without in the least imperiling his plans—the reverse. Happy is the man who can so order his affairs that duty will drive him to the goal to which inclination beckons!

When it seemed to him the right moment had come he dressed with the most painstaking attention, lingering over the small details of his toilet with an anxiety that would excite the derision of those who do not appreciate the importance of detail. No great man, not even the dandified first Napoleon, about to enter a council of state, ever looked more carefully to arrangement of hair, to color and knot of scarf, to set of collar and crease of trouser leg and coat sleeve than did Blagden about to play his final trump in the game that held for him in its event happiness and affluence or chagrin and servitude. Nor did he neglect the admonition of Whistler *that art is not in showing pains but in effacing all traces*

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of it. With not a hair out of place, and not a hair looking as if he had given it a thought, he sought Sophy in her own sitting room at an hour when he knew they would not be interrupted. As his solicitude about apparently frivolous details was not vanity but appreciation of the proper means toward a given end, he did not look at her for the flattery of an admiring glance. His mind was composed for his part; his stiffness, his melancholy, his dignity were real, as he said:

“Mrs. Murdock, I have come to tell you I must go.”

As he spoke he glanced at her and away—the highest art—the art that conceals his art even from the artist. For in that glance he had seen the woman he loved, the woman who had grown dearer and dearer to him as he had watched her and developed her like a gardener a rare flower. She was looking sweet and even lovely. She had figure and also beauty of face; her hair was tastefully arranged, her eyes, her nose, her teeth, her skin were fine. She seemed not a day over thirty—younger than he; like an elder sister of her daughter. “Go?” she echoed in a frightened voice, and the morning paper slipped from her trembling hand to the floor. It was now a thoroughly manicured hand; the polished, beveled nails were exquisite.

“I have been thinking it out,” he went on, almost coldly. “There are reasons which I perhaps ought to confess to you. But I cannot. I must resign and go.”

“I can’t get along without you!”

The color came into his cheeks, a most becoming expression of sincere gratitude into his eyes. “It is very good of you to say that. I have done my best to make amends by doing all I could to lighten your burdens.”

“Make amends? I don’t understand.”

“I can’t explain. I haven’t the courage. . . . As

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soon as you can make other arrangements, I ask you to release me."

Sophy was on the verge of tears. She felt the props, all the props, slipping from under her comfortable life. "And here," said she, "I was thinking how smoothly and happily everything was going." The tears were coursing down her cheeks now. "It seems I'm fated to be miserable. I wish I had never been born!"

"Don't!" Blagden entreated. "It is my duty to go. Please don't appeal to my weakness."

"You simply mustn't go," she cried, encouraged to redouble her entreaties. "You can have anything you want—*anything*." She gave him a long look, smiled softly through her tears—and an altogether alluring mouth she had, now that the gold fillings in her front teeth were replaced by perfectly matched and wonderfully mortised porcelain. "Anything!" she repeated.

He interlaced his fingers to restrain himself. "Sophy!" he murmured. Then bracing against a very real diffidence: "After all, why should I be ashamed of what I cannot help! How can I help loving you? I've loved you for years. And instead of getting myself under control, as I thought I would, if I had other responsibilities toward you, I— Sophy, I cannot bear it. I must go away."

She had grown pale. Her lips trembled with nervousness. She said, tenderly and sweetly, "said you could have—*anything*."

He took her hands and kissed them. And in tremors, his color, the light in his eyes set her to quivering with a passion that had been dormant since motherhood and her first lover's impetuosity had withered it down to those tenaciously vital roots which only age could kill. She disengaged one of her hands and gently stroked his

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hair. "I love you," she murmured. "You *will* stay, won't you—dear?"

He lowered his head, lest she should see the rush of tears to his eyes. How ashamed he was of the wretched intriguing he had done! "I have made myself unworthy of her," he muttered. And aloud he said in a sad, firm voice, "I can't, Sophy. I can't."

"I tell you, I love you," she repeated, the warm beauty of her passion in her voice and in her face. "I didn't realize it until—just lately. But I suppose I couldn't have made him let me get the divorce—" No, there was no time for lying; before this deep emotion she dared not be insincere—"I mean, wouldn't have got divorce—if I hadn't seen where my future lay."

He released her hand, went to the window.

"Do you despise me for confessing that—that I cared for you while I was still—not divorced?" She said this pathetically. "I know it was wicked," she went on, "but I—I couldn't help it. I was so alone. I had been so alone for years."

He turned impetuously. "Don't make me loathe myself!" he cried. "If you knew, how you would scorn me!"

She gazed at him tenderly, admiring his bright hair, the proud poise of his head upon athletic shoulders, the straight, aristocratically narrow figure that appeared to be the best advantage in the well-draped English clothes he was wearing. "Scorn you?" She laughed gently. "Why, of course you're human. We all do things we oughtn't. And women don't inquire into the pasts of men—not sensible women."

He heaved a deep sigh. "I'm too hard on myself," he thought. At least, he had been true to her. If he had not, if his offenses had been of that character, would

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he be hesitating? Really, had not his actual sins been far less grave, as between her and him?

"What is it—dear?" she urged, going toward him, drawn by that look. "There's something you are not telling me."

"I *can't* give you up, Sophy!" he cried, advancing toward her passionately, then halting.

She laid her hand on his arm. "Must I do *all* the courting, Melville?" she said, tenderness and mischief in her eyes. "I don't care what you've done. I know what you are to *me*, and that's all I want to know."

Their lips met. "You are so good, so beautiful," he murmured, kissing her between phrases, and holding her tightly against him. "Ah, how ashamed you make me feel! But I loved you, Sophy. You'd forgive me anything for that, wouldn't you?"

Her answer was her arms round his neck and her lips upon his. Indeed she would. Those days of his moroseness, with no sympathetic talker and listener about her past and her future, had taught her how she needed him, how unthinkable life was without him, and him in a good humor.

He presently went on: "I'll soon get what I must have, to be happy with you. I feel that my love, our love, will sharpen my wits. We must be on an equality, Sophy. I could never consent to be merely a rich woman's husband. You can call it false pride—and no doubt it is. But that's the way I feel, and I'd be unhappy if I married you and were dependent on you."

"I should think so!" she exclaimed. She pushed him away into a chair. She seated herself on the arm of it. He tried to draw her into his lap, but she laughingly resisted. "No, I'm too heavy—yet," said she. Both laughed, and he forced her to slip down and made her

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very, very comfortable. "Now," she said, "we're going to talk sense. We're not children; so I can speak frankly. I wouldn't for a moment tolerate the idea of the man I loved being a dependent on anybody. And I'll see to it that you are not."

Tears stood in his eyes. In a social system based upon material gain, money represents the supreme test of generosity. He had not believed such generosity as Sophy was here showing existed anywhere in human nature. It awed him; it tinged his love for her with reverence for her character. Nor was his fine feeling marred by any cynical-wise reflection that after all she was proposing to give what had cost her nothing. "O Sophy, Sophy!" he cried brokenly.

"You're making a great fuss about a very tiny matter," laughed she, sincere in so saying, though she would have thought him most unappreciative had he agreed with her. "What is money for but to get happiness? And—" She pressed her cheek against his—"you are my happiness."

"I can't! I can't!" he muttered.

"You'd make me wretched, all for nothing? No, no, dear. I know your heart better than that. Some women can get along without anybody to look after them. I'm not one of that kind. I'm the old-fashioned sort of woman—'the sort mother used to make.' I've got to be taken care of. I've needed it always. I never had it. That's why—" She interrupted herself. "But, no matter. That's all past and gone. At least, I don't feel like talking about it just now." She kissed him, pressed her hands to his cheeks, smiled softly into his eyes. "Whose duty is it to take care of me?"

"There's only one answer to that," he admitted. "But——"

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"It's settled," said she, putting her fingers on his lips. "I'm going to have my way this once if you never let me have it again."

"I'll think it over. And you, too, must think it over."

"But you're not going away to do your thinking! I'd not have a minute's peace. You ought to be ashamed of yourself—making the woman do all the persuading and courting."

She was in his arms again. "Not quite all," he said. "Eh?"

"Not quite," she murmured, utterly happy, happy as never in the days of her youth, for then she had not had the trials and sorrows that alone can teach us to appreciate life's joys.

XXXII

"C'EST LA VIE"

THEY decided to keep their secret for several months—that is, until a month or so before their marriage. But such a secret is not easily kept; soon every one in the household, and that meant everyone in Saint K, knew there was "something doing" between Mrs. Murdock and her suave, elegant secretary; and soon hereafter the gossip at the Country Club was that Murdock perhaps deserved more sympathy than he had got.

"A manly man," observed Mrs. Dorsey, "will go to any length to shield the mother of his children from scandal. Does anybody know just when Blagden became Murdock's secretary? I've been away so much I can't remember. Was it before or after the birth of young Charley?"

Everybody knew it was years, ten years at least, after Charley's birth; but nobody had so little regard for the general pleasure as to say so. Presently Mrs. Vermilye remarked:

"I always wondered how Sophy could be content to stay at home and see so few people. When a woman gets it young, as fat as Sophy was until worry thinned her own, it's supposed to be a sure sign she has a man with whom she is content. Any physiologist will tell you that."

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And Mrs. Monfort completed the syllogism with: "Certainly, we all know Sophy's content couldn't have come from Murdock."

Charley began to chafe under the hints and smirks; but he now had the wisdom to keep his own counsel—he wished to go back to Yale, and he did not wish to have his allowance cut. However, at the end of the long vacation, the day before he started East, his desire to meddle prevailed with his prudence sufficiently to permit him to enlighten his sister, that she might take his place on guard. "No doubt Blagden would gladly marry as big a bunch as mother must have now," said he to Norma. "And you know mother; she'd be easy fruit for as smooth a citizen as he."

Norma had her baby in her lap, was crooning to it. "Well, what of it, Charley?" she replied in the same singsong undertone, as the change of voice might rouse the sleeper.

"What of it!" cried Charley.

"Sh—h!" warned Norma. "Sh—h!" The baby had opened its big Degarmo eyes. "Rock-a-by, baby, in the treetop——"

"You didn't understand me," pursued he, in a less startling tone.

"Oh, yes, I did," crooned his sister. "And I repeat, what of it?"

Charley stared at her in disgust. "Well!" was all he said.

Norma went on with soothing her baby until she had it sound asleep. She took it into the adjoining room and laid it in its crib. When she returned she all but closed the door. "Don't shout and don't whisper," said she. "Either will start him up, and it's his time for sleep."

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"I know you don't want mother to make a silly marriage any more than I do," proceeded Charley. "The trouble with you is, you're so taken up with that baby of yours you can't think of anything else."

"Guilty!" said Norma, smiling.

"Oh, you needn't glory in it." Charley was irritated into frankness. "It's really disgraceful. Why, if I had a wife and she treated me as you treat Joe I'd read the riot act. No wonder he hangs out at the Country Club, morning, noon, and night, sopping up the highballs and alternating golf and bridge. First thing you know, one of those good-looking young married women up there will succeed in getting him away from you. I should think father and mother's case would have taught you."

Norma made a brave attempt at a smile of contemptuous indifference. "Always attending to other people's business!"

"Well — you look out — that's all. And, by gad, you're taking on flesh, too—quite matronly. I was just watching you as you went in with the baby. Your back's booming, and your hips— Well, my dear, hips are clear out. They're not only unfashionable; they're —common."

Norma was furious; he had rudely ripped the veil from truths she had been for some time carefully concealing from herself.

"That's right, get mad at me instead of at the one that's to blame." Nothing pleased him so much as reducing some one to speechless rage before a crushing truth. "You'd better take a tumble to yourself," he went on. "And you can look after mother a bit, too."

"Why shouldn't she marry Mr. Blagden if she wants to?" Norma asked, concentrating her irritation against

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her brother upon that branch of his lecture which gave it an opening. "He's all right, isn't he?"

Charley stared at her. "What's got into you, Norma? Haven't you any moral sense left—any sense of decency?"

"Mother must have somebody. I'm married. You will be, in a year or so—you're far too susceptible to flattery to escape long, when you have such tempting prospects."

"*There's* another reason! What'll become of *us* if that redhead gets hold of the dough-bag?"

"Now, the truth is out!" exclaimed Norma, teasingly.

But Charley was not disconcerted. "Well, granted that's what ails me. Why not? You and Joe have got plenty. But what's to become of *me*? I had courage, I broke with father. I haven't written to him."

Norma flushed at the insinuation, but refused to gratify her brother by yielding to the temptation to defend herself. "Mother will look out for you, never fear."

"Yes, but she's a young woman yet. I never saw anything like the change in her. Suppose she marries him; suppose there are some more children——"

"Charley!" She dropped into a chair and covered her face. She felt that he had insulted their mother.

"Now, now, don't put on!" cried he. "We've got to face this thing. Whether what I said is shocking or not, isn't it *likely*?"

Norma was silent.

"And," pursued her brother, "father'll be marrying again. He's a young man, and will no doubt marry a young woman. He'd be eligible for a girl just out of school. It's done every day—men older than he."

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"Isn't it—frightful!" Norma's eyes showed how profoundly she was shocked.

"C'est la vie," replied her brother, with a shrug. "I'm learning to accept life without criticism. Criticising it seems rather futile—like suggesting modifications in the law of gravitation or denouncing the moon for not shining full every night. Of course, I'd like to have the world better—not too good, or I'd feel out of it—but still, better. But I can't see how it improves matters to begin by denying that the world and the people in it are what they are. Divorce—remarriage—all part of the game. Tout cela, c'est la vie."

"Yes, it is life," admitted Norma mournfully. "And, after all, father and mother have the same right to seek happiness that we have."

Charley's laugh was disagreeable. "If Joe were to lose his money you might not change your pretended philosophy, but you'd certainly cease to be quietly resigned."

"Perhaps," admitted Norma. With reluctance and against protests from illusion and delusion, she was daily discovering facts in life and in human nature she had never realized before, had often denied—those unpleasant hardnesses beneath the velvet which have no reality for us until they press brutally upon us. "What do you propose?"

"Why, get after mother. Wake her up."

Norma reflected long. "It'd be of no use," she finally said, slowly shaking her head. "Besides, mother will be left alone when you marry. She's practically alone now. She's got to have companionship. And, if she must marry, why not Mr. Blagden?"

Charley, too, had been thinking. He could find no answer to his sister's question.

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"I don't agree with you that he's merely mercenary," she went on. "A man couldn't be as nice to everybody as he is without having a genuinely good heart."

"I admit I've got no objections to Blagden as a man," said Charley. "But— Damn it all, Norma, mother and father owe it to *us* not to marry! What a rotten, rotten mess they've made!"

Norma astonished him by looking emphatic dissent.

"You don't mean to say you approve of this scandal!"

"No, no, Charley," she answered. "But I can't help seeing now that mother and father weren't suited to each other. Look how this has roused her into improving herself. The change in her is almost miraculous."

"I tell you, that's Blagden."

"Well, isn't he a force that couldn't have come into her life but for the divorce? And, surely, she's better off than she was before. She was a burden to herself and to everyone."

"If father had done his duty——"

"If — if — if," echoed Norma impatiently. "Who ever does? Who ever will? The truth is, they had lost interest in each other——"

"Just as you have in——"

Norma colored angrily. "If it were true, your saying so would still be an impertinence. But it isn't."

"Well—look out, old girl. It might become mutual. Your getting cross shows there's something wrong." He clapped her good-naturedly on the shoulder. "Those hips! And the up-to-the-mark young married women at the club! And do try to keep mother steady. Perhaps you are right about her future. I hadn't thought of that. . . . I'm off to-night. I guess it'll all muddle through

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show. Gad, I'm glad I stand in with our prospective a."

Norma winced again. She could reason about the situation; but reason was unable to down an instinct that whole performance, including her being able to reason about it, was somehow immoral. "C'est la vie," repeated. "But, since it is life, why are we brought to believe it isn't? The world has changed, yet we continue to be educated in the ways and the ideas that are dead." She made a scornful face. "Hips! What a plane!" But she went to her dressing room and, for the first time in many a month, examined her figure, front and back, in the long triple mirrors. "Charley was right," she decided. "I must 'get busy.'" She sighed. "Perhaps not such a low plane, after all. It's not slovenly hips outside evidence of a slovenly life?"

XXXIII

" LOVE IN TIGHT SHOES "

THE newspaper cables reported Murdock and "the Hastings woman" arrived at Paris and, presently, installed in an Avenue Henri Martin villa, small but like a jewel casket, so exquisitely was it carved without, so delicately furnished within. The villa was historic and had been thoroughly photographed; thus, the illustrated press was able to stimulate the imagination of the public. From Maine to Mexico, quiet people, leading lives far less tedious than luxurious vice ever afforded, were participating with fascinated horror in the Babylonish revels they assumed were under wild and wicked way in those hand-painted, silk-draped chambers, within those carved and statued walls.

The truth was far less commonplace. Viola, with Lilly her faithful colored maid and several French servants, was alone at the villa, was leading the dreariest of lives, embittered by the luxury of the solitude—everything to enable one to enjoy life, but no life to enjoy. Each afternoon Murdock called in a victoria and exhibited himself with Viola at his left during an hour's drive, twice round the big lake in the Bois and home again. He was living, or, rather, hiding, at the Hotel Monsigny, behind the Bourse; he chose it because it was frequented by continentals only—no Americans, no English, no one who would take the faintest interest in his movements.

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For a time the excitement of the fascinating streets and shop windows and shops, the delirium of getting the finery she craved at the world's headquarters for finery kept up Viola's spirits. But not even Paris and an all but bottomless purse, and a procession of hair dressers, masseuses, manicures, pedicures, skilled time-consumers all, could fill in the whole of the long days and evenings, could for more than a few weeks put off the natural effect of Murdock's polite reserve and neglect upon her warm and sociable temperament. "It's awful, isn't it?" wailed she to her Lilly, as she was dressing for the daily drive. "Here I might be having such a *swell* time!—and he, too. . . . On the steamer you told me he was acting strange because people we knew were about. I might have known you were wrong, Lilly. Didn't I tell you he was friendliest when they were watching and froze up as soon as we were alone? . . . He's just the kind of man I could be crazy about, but he won't let me. What's the matter with me, anyway? Is there any better-looking woman? What does he want in a woman?"

"Lord knows, Miss Vi," said Lilly. She was on her knees, changing Viola's shoes for slippers. "It don't make no difference, seems to me. Jes' you quietly go long, takin' all you can git your pretty hands on—that's *my* advice. He's usin' you as some kind of a blind, but don't you let on. He's a pow'ful generous man, but pow'ful heady, too. You kin have all the fun when he settles up and goes off."

"But I don't want him to go!" cried Viola. And she fell to weeping miserably. "O Lilly! I love him. I do—I do! He's the only really gentleman I ever knew. That wife of his must have been crazy to let him get away. I want him, and I can't get near him. He's got

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a way of looking that makes me freeze up on the outside and burn like a house afire inside."

Lilly went placidly on with unhooking Viola's blouse. She worked slowly; for lack of occupation they had begun the toilet for the drive two hours before Murdock would come. "Now, honey, don't you be a silly. You's always fallin' in love that way with any feller that's nice to you. Us women's so weak. And it ain't the way to git on. Give him what he wants, as a sensible woman always does. If he wants love, give him love. If he wants jes' a nice polished time, play you'se a lady. Be glad when he comes, forgit him when he goes—and send him the bills. That's the way to treat the men. But don't you spoil them lovely eyes with no tears."

"But I tell you I love him!" cried Viola, stamping her foot angrily.

"Of course yer does, baby, of course yer does," soothed Lilly, patting the soft baby shoulders as she took away the blouse. "And there ain't no harm in that. But love him gay and cheerful-like." She held the dressing sack of chiffon and lace. "Laws, birdie! Don't take things to heart, as long as the bills is paid. Don't skeer away the first liberal spender yer ever got."

Viola began to dry her eyes.

"Jes' think of them stockbroker tight-wads with their rolls glued where they ought to begin to peel. Say nothin' and throw the hay into the barn."

This set Viola off on the subject of her bitter experiences with "tight-wads." She was so absorbed that an hour took its leaden, yawning self out of the way before she returned to the immediate present. She examined herself in the full-length, triple mirrors.

"Now," she said ruefully, "I *do* look a sight! You oughtn't to have let me cry, Lilly. Whatever will

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I do, with my eyes swelled and my cheeks in streaks, and he coming in half an hour.”

She was in corset-cover and petticoat, both much befouled with real lace. She turned her eyes from her face to her figure, with the result that her face instantly began to improve. She put her hands behind her head, drawing her thick hair forward upon her slim young shoulders; she posed herself in attitudes that brought out in succession the different sets of graceful curves that justified her self-admiration. No, there was no denying she had the right to be vain; besides, her vanity was so simple, so ingenuous, it rather added to her charm. If she lived a hundred years she would remain a child at heart. She seated herself, all smiles and hope again. Lilly resumed dressing her hair, undisturbed and but little delayed by the constant agitations of her head necessitated by her emotions. The hair finished, Lilly produced a wonderful pale-blue carriage coat which had just come from Paquin. It had a broad, white collar and cuffs, and its many buttons were huge and gold. “It’s even sweller than I thought,” said Viola, her eyes lingering upon it in loving tenderness. “Now, get out my hat with the long, blue plume—the one that stands out. And—yes, I’ll wear that new white cloth dress—the Callot one—and——”

So her troubles vanished for the time; her face became as smooth and sweet and young as was its wont. When she descended to drive with Murdock she was bubbling and sparkling like a forest spring, and as little suggested care or impurity.

His formal smile softened at sight of her. For the moment he forgot how monotonous it was behind those limpid, lustrous eyes, sparkling with invitation to impulses of passion. “You are very charming, very Pa-

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risienne to-day," said he. And his grave eyes roamed from her plumes down that graceful, gracefully clad figure to where her skirts, white over delicate blue, were held high to reveal stockings so diaphanous that they almost seemed an azure tint upon her long, slender calves and ankles. "Very charming," he repeated.

This sufficed to lift her quite to the dizzy pinnacle of delight. Everyone, looking back upon his or her years, recalls habitually some moment or hour or day which shines out of the vistas of the past as the very best. In after years Viola always recalled that drive as her supreme moment, the high tide of youth and joy. The weather was perfect; the Bois was at its gayest. The drives thronged with handsome turn-outs, each bearing at least one woman dressed in exquisite taste; the walks and woods and lawns filled with happy, well-dressed, well-mannered children and their watchful, loving mothers and nurses. And Viola drank it all in, slowly, luxuriously, enjoying each second as if she were a child dreaming of fairies with no cloud upon delight except a faint fear of awakening. "Can't we go round *once* more?" she pleaded.

"Twice, if you like," said he.

And as they were passing D'Armenonville he suggested tea. "If you only would!" cried she, clasping her hands in ecstasy. As they drove, everyone had been looking at her. Now that they were seated where her beauty of face and form and dress could be surveyed at leisure, both the women and the men of that attractive throng of idlers frankly stared.

"There must be something wrong with me, that everyone is rubbinging so," said she, affecting great uneasiness.

But her ruse was not successful. "It's your beauty

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—and your long, blue feather," replied he absently. Presently he roused himself to say: "In return for what you've done for me, it's only fair I should do something for you—something toward securing your future. . . . You're probably not the most provident person in the world—are you?"

"I never had a chance to find out," confessed she. "It always took everything I could get to keep me afloat."

"Well, we'd better not risk it. No doubt, there's some scamp somewhere whom you think you care for and whom you'd give anything he asked."

"No, indeed," she assured him, her eyes eloquent. "Truly, there's nobody—*nobody*." There was a little catch in her voice as she added shyly, "nobody else."

He laughed with careless incredulity. "No matter. It seems to me it would be wise to put my investment for you in trust. You will have only the income, but you'll have that always."

She was so happy that joy seemed to irradiate from her like rays from a star. "You're perfectly right," said she. "I'd rather have it that way." Then with an absence of worldliness she would have risked, even had she not known how safe she was, she added: "Though I'm sure I've done nothing for you. . . . You haven't let me. I never saw such a man."

His face clouded. "I wish I could—I wish I could," he said to himself rather than to her. "But I'm a damn fool."

His expression, the outward sign of an emotion beyond the range of any she was capable of feeling or understanding, made her shrink silent into herself, as one draws back from a precipice. Presently he said, "I'm off for good to-night."

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"Aren't you going to take me?" she cried, her voice shrill with alarm.

He looked at her with a sad gentleness that made her eyes fill. "It's a long and hard journey. I must go alone."

"I'd go *anywhere* with you," she pleaded wistfully. "Won't you let me—care for you?"

The hardest of the men who play the game of life with human pawns winces when one of the pawns shows that it is hurt, sends a human cry of pain into his very ears; and Murdock, though relentless, was anything but hard. For the moment he could not satisfy his conscience by reminding it that while it was true that Viola was as easily pained as a child it was also true that she recovered and forgot as easily and completely. He winced before her pained, reproachful eyes, before those tears she was too deeply in awe of him to shed. "That sort of thing is out of my life forever," said he, his tone curt and cold, with intent to pique and repel. "To finish our arrangements. I took the house for three months. If you wish to keep it you can. I do not insist, but I should like it if you would stay on there at least a month longer—alone. And I hope you'll not go back to America for six months. Can you stand it here?"

"I'd be glad to. If you wish, I'll agree not to see anybody. And I'll keep my word."

"Oh, no, I don't ask that. But please try to stay on until the late fall, say—and keep away from English and Americans. Go to Biarritz. You'll make very attractive acquaintances there. If you once got into the ways on this side you'd like it far better than America. They're more—tolerant in their ideas. They don't take life so solemnly and sourly as we do."

The victoria was at the villa. With most respectful

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formality he assisted her to alight. "The trap and the horses are yours, of course," said he, lifting his hat and extending his hand.

"Good-by," she responded awkwardly, making him a funny little bow reminiscent of her childhood in the dull prim village from which a "drummer's" tales of the gorgeous gayety of New York had lured her. "Good-by. Thank you."

She did not cry until she was in the house, with the quaintly carved court door closed behind her by her butler. He watched with sympathy and alarm. Madame was very young and pitiful—most pitiful, most forlorn, as she leaned upon the balustrade in tears; but— Evidently monsieur had at last definitely dismissed her, probably without funds— The situation was uncertain, the outlook cloudy, and it behooved a prudent servant to prepare for the worst. She entered her boudoir, sobbing. "Hurry, Lil!" she cried. "Help me off with my things before I spoil them. I'm going to have hysterics." And, eased of her finery, she proceeded to have them, Lilly standing by to take care of her when the spasm should be over, but meanwhile holding aloof.

"Now honey, you feels better, don't you?" said she, with motherlike tenderness as soon as there was sign of cessation.

"Cognac, Lil."

She drank it straight down, turned the emptied crystal between her fingers and gazed at it reflectively. "Perhaps it's just as well. I never did feel at ease with him. I never could. He isn't at all my style."

"Nothing like good solid comfort, dearie," assented the maid. "There ain't much in love in tight shoes, deed there ain't."

"I wonder how much he'll leave for me. . . . I'll

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able Jessie to run over. She needs a vacation. . . . Did that hat come from Esther Mayer?" A huge sigh. "I'll cry myself to sleep, many a night."

"That's the best time, honey. Then it don't do the eyes no harm."

A long silence, with Lilly bathing her face. Then: "Still, I could have loved him if he'd have let me. I wonder who it is? I felt it the first night I met him."

XXXIV

SOPHY STARTS AFRESH

BLAGDEN, reading the *St. Christopher Gazette* at his solitary breakfast, frowned as his eyes caught upon this paragraph:

It is said that the engagement of Mrs. Murdock of the Eyrie and Mr. Melville Blagden will soon be announced.

He laid aside the paper, ate his breakfast slowly, with long pauses to survey reflectively, between the wide-flung glass doors of the breakfast room, the prospect of perfectly ordered lawns, gardens, hedges, drives, and woods, a prospect vastly improved since he had been installed as Mrs. Murdock's general manager, but still far from his exalted ideal. Life was moving delightfully at the Eyrie; this paragraph, publishing broadcast what had been merely a local rumor, meant an interruption, a crisis—a rehash throughout the country of the Murdock scandal, freshened with a sauce of scandal about Blagden and the divorced wife. At first blush he had been angry and somewhat alarmed. But, as he thought the matter over, he decided that the crisis, which must have come sooner or later, could not have found him better prepared.

"I'll not be really secure until we are married," said he to himself. "In my devotion to her affairs I mustn't let my own drift. That would be bad, very

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bad." He glanced at the servant with eyes that saw surfaces to the minutest detail and noted a flaw as if it were capped with a magnifying glass. The servants at the Eyrie were fairly well trained now, as well trained as could be expected of even an imported menial class out West, where the environment was all against the menial spirit. At Blagden's glance the servant, standing at respectful attention, removed his plate, brought an ash tray, a box of cigarettes and a spirit lamp. "You forgot to brush away the crumbs, James," said Blagden.

The servant removed the things he had just set down, cleaned the space before Blagden, returned the cigarettes, lamp and tray, and was about to pour the coffee. "You have forgotten your cuffs—again," said Blagden. James reddened, retired to the pantry, soon reappeared with cuffs showing at the ends of his coat sleeves. "That's better," approved the manager of the Eyrie. And the coffee was poured.

Blagden was by nature and by careful education an expert in the art of living fashionably. Perhaps in other surroundings his ability at organization and leadership might have found wider employment—though it by no means follows that a man has genius for the large because he shows genius for the little. Large affairs did not interest him; fashionable people, the fashionable mode of life, seemed to him the highest expression of mundane existence. In matters of food and wine and dress, of household economy, luxury and æsthetics, he was an authority. The Eyrie was his first opportunity to give free range to this genius of his; and, though he had been in charge but a few months and had had to combat the most disheartening obstacles, chiefly arising from the indifference and contempt

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in which such refinements of civilized cultured life were held so far from Europe and direct European influence, he had achieved results of which he was not ashamed.

"I've been so absorbed in making this place fit for a gentleman to live in," thought he, "that I've lost sight of the main point."

Just there his face lighted up with an expression of tenderness and pride. In the doorway was Sophy, habited for a ride—Sophy, the real monument to this rare genius of his, genius of a species until recently not highly esteemed. Whenever he looked at her, he swelled with the creator's pride. His labor of transforming her, like his labor of transforming the Eyrie, was by no means finished; but so rapidly and so far had it advanced that one could already see the ultimate woman, as the statue that is to be appears in the marble soon after the sculptor has begun work. Youth's springtime he could not conjure back for Sophy; she had neglected herself too long for that. But by inducing her to walk and to ride, to diet, to keep him company in systematic regular habits, and to interest herself in his work as manager and major-domo and installer of fashion—work easily within her range—by rousing her desire to please him and by keeping it stimulated—in a word, by giving her love and intelligent loving interest he had lifted her above the life of mere eating and sleeping, had re-created her into a handsome, well-proportioned woman in youth's summer, with clear eyes and skin, with solid and shapely flesh, with a carriage that showed pride in her appearance, and self-respect. He had made of her an object lesson in the might of regularity and persistence when inspired by Purpose.

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"Good morning!" cried she, as he rose. "The horses are waiting."

"I'm ready," said he. Then his glance fell upon the *Gazette*, and his face clouded.

"What is it?" she asked, for she watched his features nowadays as a farmer the sky. "Bad news!"

"I'll tell you when we get under way." And as the horses were walking side by side along the drive toward the hill road, he said, "The *Gazette* publishes our engagement."

"Isn't that outrageous! What business is it of theirs?"

"That means," pursued he, "columns in the Chicago papers—in all the papers. The whole scandal warmed over—and—doubtless some nasty insinuations about you and me."

"I don't care."

"Yes, you do," replied he. "And so do I. Sophy, we must be married at once."

The horses walked a quarter of a mile before either spoke again. He held his gaze sternly ahead; she glanced at him anxiously from time to time. "You mustn't ask that," she said at last. "I couldn't do it yet. Think how people would talk."

"True," observed he, coldly. "So, I'm going away. And I'll not return until you're ready to marry."

"Are you angry with me, Melville?"

"With myself. I oughtn't have stayed on here. No wonder people talk. I should have had more consideration for you."

"You stayed because I wanted you, because I needed you. I simply couldn't have got along without you. You know as well as I do how much you've done

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for me." She looked at Blagden with a touching and thrilling tenderness in her lovely eyes. "You've given me something to live for, and have taught me how to live. . . . Melville, you won't go away?"

"I must. God knows, I'm not looking forward to it with pleasure. But there's no alternative. I am causing people to talk about *you*."

"I tell you, I don't care. I do as I please."

"You are going to be my wife. I have plans for you—for our future here and in the East, and we mustn't do anything that would interfere."

She saw that his will was fixed. She was consciously and proudly dependent upon him as plant upon sun. She was not only eager to please; she feared to offend. "I don't see how we could marry—anyways soon," ventured she hesitatingly.

"Why not?"

"When?"

"To-day—this afternoon—no, right away—and leave for a trip to-night."

"But the scandal——"

"We're in for it, anyhow. Why not have it all over with? Yes, let's marry this morning. Don't you see that's the sensible thing to do? The engagement has been suspected by everybody here for a month. It has been announced now. Isn't it clear, Sophy, that the sooner it's all over the better? Besides—" He gave her a long, eager look, a meaning smile upon his lips, the seriousness of the lover in his eyes.

She colored. "It *does* seem sensible," she murmured.

Blagden's thus easy victory, like all his victories with her, took him by surprise. His love and awe of her and of her wealth made it impossible for him to appreci-

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ate how completely under his control she was. Also, his nature had that streak of pessimism so necessary to success; he always took the gloomy view, saw the reasons why he probably would not get what he wanted long before he saw the brighter prospects. But his surprise did not paralyze action. He laid his hand caressingly upon her arm. "Sophy"—he urged tenderly. And his eyes said the rest.

Her expression was assent.

He lifted his horse into a canter, hers keeping pace. In the outskirts of the eastern end of Saint X there was a Baptist Church, the parsonage adjoining. The parson's wife called him in from the corn field; and, without his changing his clothes, or even putting on a coat, the marriage was solemnized—a high-stepping hen led her twittering, huddling brood in at the open front door, through the dingy little parlor and out at the back door, just as he read the last lines of the service. He closed the book, put his spectacles in his vest pocket, said without the smallest intent of humor, "Well, Mrs. Blagden, better luck this time."

Sophy suddenly felt hysterically gay. She and Blagden looked at each other, laughed outright. And she, shaking hands with the preacher, replied, eyes dancing, and the look of a girl in them: "Thank you, Mr. Paget, and I think your wish'll come true."

"Very likely, ma'am," replied Paget. "You're old enough to know what you're about this time. Then, too, you've had experience. I often tell my wife no woman is fit to be a wife till she's been married at least once."

"How about the man?" inquired Blagden.

"Oh, he don't count. Marrying is a woman's business."

As they rode away, the parson and his wife and his

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angular old-maid sister in faded pink calico waving from the doorway, Blagden's eyes were dim. "If anyone had asked me about it beforehand," said he in a very uncertain voice, "I'd have said a wedding in such circumstances would be a farce. But I feel now that—Sophy, it was just you and I, wasn't it—with no pretense coming between us—just you and I, pledging ourselves to each other."

The horses drew together until their flanks touched. Blagden bent toward his wife, kissed her passionately. "I shall do my best to make you happy," he said. "My best, so help me God!"

When they straightened in the saddle again, their cheeks were wet with each other's tears. And each felt that those tears had washed the past clean, that at last they were to have the chance to be and to do what God had intended.

Joe and Norma happened to come out to lunch that day; after lunch, while the two men were in the billiard room, Sophy told her daughter the news. "I don't think," began she, "you'll be much surprised to hear Mr. Blagden and I got married this morning."

"No," replied Norma, in a tone of quiet sincerity. "I've been expecting it. . . . I'm glad." And she embraced her mother with enthusiasm.

"I looked at it from all sides," continued Sophy, to impress her daughter that the affair was more practical than romantic. "It seemed the best thing to do."

"Charley and I talked it over before he went East," said Norma, "and we came to the same conclusion."

"Your father and I," continued Sophy, encouraged to full confidence, "never were suited to each other. We were mighty fond of each other for a while; I never

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could be fond of anybody else in just the same way. But it was the kind that flares up and then winks out. I guess it was as much my fault as his. I didn't understand him at all, and we were both too young to look at things seriously before we'd got into the habit of not caring at all for each other. I was bitter against him until this morning. But, as Melville and I were riding home after the ceremony, it came over me what a great favor Murdock had done me—without intending it. If I hadn't have met Melville I suppose I'd never have realized it."

"I've never seen such a change, mother. You're not the same person—not at all."

"I'm more like what I used to be, before I fell into the way of not caring what happened. Everybody's got to have somebody to keep them up to the mark, and I had nobody. But that's all over and done now." Sophy gave a sigh of content.

"Blagden is a very nice fellow," said Norma. "He has a good character and a good heart. He's the sort of man a woman can trust to be kind to her if she gives him half a chance."

"I was a little afraid you and Charley would turn against him."

"We want you to be happy. And we believe he'll try to make you happy. . . . He hasn't much money of his own, has he?"

Sophy colored furiously. "What's *that* got to do with it?" she demanded, ready to bristle.

"Now, please, mother! Do wait till I finish before you get angry. I was simply going to ask you if you didn't think he ought to be made independent. It seems to me it cuts into a man's self-respect to have to come to a woman for money, and I've noticed women are worse

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about those things than men. They seem to enjoy making a man come to them, even for pocket money. If I were a poor man I'd rather beg in the streets than marry the average rich woman."

Sophy looked embarrassed. "I'd thought of that," said she, "and I'd about made up my mind to do something of the kind. But—. . . There's another side, isn't there?"

"Well?" encouraged her daughter.

"We're about of an age, but— A woman, especially if she's had experience, can't help thinking of these things. You see, being a woman and he a man, I'll get old quite a while before he does probably. I don't want to lose him. If he has plenty of money maybe just when I most need him he'll be—neglecting me."

"That's true," admitted Norma, admiring the vein of shrewdness under her mother's simplicity. "But a woman's got to take her chance it seems to me. He cares for you now. If he began to feel dependent on you in a petty, sordid way he'd soon hate you. And—wouldn't you rather lose a man altogether than have him playing the hypocrite? Besides, it seems to me, if one acts meanly, does mean things from mean motives, it destroys one's own power of enjoyment. You'd soon be miserable—suspecting him of hypocrisy and despising him, even though you might cling to him because there wasn't anyone else convenient."

"Then you'd advise me to give him part of what I've got—outright?"

"Outright," was Norma's emphatic answer. "Don't throw away your best chance of happiness, mother. Don't be halfway generous. That's worse than out and out meanness because it's weak and cowardly as well as mean."

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Sophy reflected. "I guess you're right," she finally said. For the first time in their lives she looked at her daughter as if she were both daughter and friend. "You don't think I'm mean for harboring such ideas?"

"Indeed not!" replied Norma warmly. "That's human nature. And it's only right that in such an important matter one should look at all sides—especially at the under side—for that's the foundation."

"I got to thinking about how near of an age we were, and about how much it meant to me to—to have him." Sophy's voice was trembling. "And it frightened me."

Norma stood behind her mother and kissed her. "Just do what your generous heart prompts you to do, dear," she said. "Then—no matter what comes you may be certain it's better than what would have come if you'd been small or sordid. Tempt him to be honorable, not dishonorable."

"I will," declared Sophy. "I'll do it right away. And now I've made up my mind I can't understand how I could ever have thought of anything else."

When Joe and Blagden came in, Norma said to Blagden, "Mother has been telling me." She put out both her hands with a friendly smile. "I am so glad—glad for both of you."

"What's this?" cried Joe. "An engagement?"

"Better than that," answered Norma. "They slipped away quietly this morning and were married. Aren't you going to kiss me, Mr. Blagden?"

Blagden kissed her. His face was fiery and his hands trembled. "Thank you, Norma, thank you," was all he ventured to try to utter.

When she and Joe were on the way home, Joe said: "Well! You certainly did carry that off beautifully."

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ouldn't have thought there was so much diplomacy
u."

Diplomacy?" inquired Norma, looking at him in
surprise.

Making the best of it," explained Joe.

But you're mistaken," protested Norma.

Oh, come now, child. You needn't pretend with

he expression of Norma's face—astonishment, then
then an effort to hide her pain—made him scarlet
onfusion and shame. "I take that back," he said
y. "I judged you by—by myself."

orma forgot this incident—but Joe never did. It
ith him the beginning of a new belief in his wife,
hrough it, of a new view of and belief in human
e. And when a man discards the shallow cynicism
rldliness and begins to believe in his fellow-beings,
ffy means that he has begun himself to be worthy
fidence.

XXXV

THE WILD BIRD'S CAGE OPEN

VIOLA, a bewitching color scheme of violet shades, stepped from her victoria before Rumplemayer's for "just one" of those deadly, delicious babas to find herself directly in the path of Juliet Raeburn and her sister Emma walking in the Rue de Rivoli. "Why, Miss Raeburn!" exclaimed she breathlessly. "How *do* you do?"

The elder Miss Raeburn gave Viola one sweeping, searching, stripping glance, frowned, compressed her prim lips, marched straight on. But Juliet put out her hand with a friendly smile and a "How are you, Viola? How well you're looking!"

But that rebuke from militant and celibate respectability had brought Viola up standing. Her face burned scarlet. "I beg your pardon," she muttered, eyes down and lips trembling. "I forgot. I was just—just glad to see some one from home."

She moved to pass, but Juliet, who had felt rather than seen her sister's glance, detained her. "You look as if you belonged here," said she, pressing Viola's reluctant hand. "I'm glad to see you are happy."

"Indeed I'm not!" protested Viola. "I'm horribly lonesome. How I wish I was back in New York! But I've got to stay on for two months longer, and I've got

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o keep away from everybody." In her excitement she was unable to stop herself. "It's all very mysterious, isn't it? But then he's such a strange man. Oh, he's been generous to me. But—what am I saying? I'm so worried about him. I—I—"

Juliet's eyelids fluttered. "Is he ill?"

"No — at least, I don't know." Impulsively: "Won't you let me come to see you? I'm dying to speak to somebody about it. I'll come quite quietly—no one will know. Do let me come to-morrow morning, Miss Aeburn. I mustn't stand here talking to you. Somebody might see."

A look of pain came into Juliet's eyes. It seemed to her melancholy enough that a woman should be thus a pariah, when men, and women, far worse because hypocritical, were accepted, were respected; but the crowning agony was that Viola could thus recognize her position, yet live on and dress herself deliberately to attract attention. "Certainly," Juliet said. "Come to-morrow twelve. You and I will lunch together in my apartment."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," cried the girl, her eyes shimmering. "You were going in Rumplemayer's. Yes, I'm sure you were. I'll go somewhere else." And she started to the curb and signaled her coachman.

Juliet, rejoining her sister, said in response to a wistful look: "She used to work with us. Such a sweet girl, so good-natured. I am fond of her."

"You might have more regard for me than to notice her in the public street."

"I'm sorry you feel doubtful about your reputation."

"I wasn't thinking of my reputation," retorted Emma.

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"Oh—of mine?" Juliet elevated her eyebrows. "What people think of me never did interest me. That sort of reputation isn't a business asset with a woman in my line, any more than it is with a man in any line. So I haven't even business reasons for keeping up appearances."

"But respectable people——"

"Dear, dear Emma," cried Juliet, "what have I to do with respectable people? I'm not respectable. Being independent I do as I please."

"I observe you please to do respectably."

"An accident, not a virtue," was Juliet's reply, with a look deliberately intended to jar upon her sister's sensibilities—a look like a challenge from a harem lattice. "As for Viola Hastings——"

"Was that Viola Hastings?" Emma Raeburn stopped short in the street, transfixed with horror. "Viola Hastings! The woman that terrible Murdock is flaunting in everybody's face. I read about it. It was most scandalous. I think every respect—every virtuous woman should have rallied to the support of his poor, unfortunate wife."

"The *Herald* this morning says she's about to marry a Mr. Blagden who was Mr. Murdock's private secretary."

"Naturally, she wished to get rid of his name as quickly as possible. . . . To his former secretary, you say? . . . Well, at least *she's* having the decency to marry."

Juliet laughed scornfully. For the past few minutes her face had had more than its wonted pallor of the olive skin. "To marry! To marry! And that makes everything all right. If Viola had played her cards more craftily, had married one of her men for his money, had

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ired herself permanently to the same appetite, it would have been most respectable, most proper."

"Juliet! How can you, even in jest and to tease me, defend such creatures!"

"Defend? I? I'm not defending her, but neither am I attacking her. She's just the average woman, selling herself because she's too lazy to work. She has a better excuse than most of them because her beauty brought temptations too strong for a far stronger character than God saw fit to give her."

"I wish you would keep your views to yourself!"

"I do, except when they are demanded," Juliet answered. Then contritely: "Don't mind me, Emmy—dear. I'm all upset. My nerves seem suddenly to have gone to pieces."

Usually she was patient with Emma's foibles; but, in the mood into which Viola's mysterious and disquieting hints about Murdock had precipitated her, she could not listen in her wonted good-natured silence. It rasped upon her, this rancour of the homely old maid against the woman who attracted more than one man when there were obviously and cruelly not enough men to go round; this fury against the woman who gave herself for less than the standard market price, her keep for life. Virtue was the one string to Emma's harp. She had always twanged on it; latterly this twanging had become a mania. As with all celibates, the cardinal temptation, the cardinal sin, was that joy of life of which she was deprived. Normal people have many interests, the celibate but one; so it dogs his—or her—days and debauches his or her nights.

Emma could not take the hint and drop the dangerous subject. She liked to talk it because her mind was always revolving it; she had satisfactory self-excuse for

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talking it in her duty to her young sister, a genius and therefore irresponsible. Juliet led the most inoffensive of lives, a life of monotonous regularity, like inmate of convent or penitentiary, or one of the myriad wage slaves who, unconscious of their slavery, live by the clocks and whistles of their masters. This did not convince Emma. She could not quiet the fears aroused by Juliet's ardent, adventurous eyes, by the defiant curve of her mouth, by the free movements of her slender, supple body. No opportunity must be missed for ministering to Juliet, for trying to trim her nearer the social pattern for the proper, respectable human being. Accordingly, after a brief silence, Emma resumed her nagging. "To think," said she, "that you spoke friendlily to the woman who seduced Murdock from his duty."

Juliet's eyes flashed. "He was driven, not seduced," she retorted.

"Driven!"

"By his wife."

"Juliet!"

"I know what I'm talking about, Emma," cried Juliet, angered the more by her sister's scandalized tone. "His wife didn't care enough about him to try to hold him, didn't even care enough about herself to keep from becoming a fat frump. No, I shouldn't say that. I've no right to judge her. I believe she's a good woman, as women go. She's simply one more victim of the curse of woman's traditional training."

"That is," Emma said in high dudgeon, "she devoted herself to her home and her children."

"Fudge! Fudge!" cried Juliet impatiently. "Don't I work harder than any woman who keeps house, even without servants? Yet I'm not letting myself go to

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pieces, mentally and physically. Don't you manage a house—all our personal affairs, and try to manage me? Yet you contrive to be intelligent and well dressed and orderly. As for children, please don't repeat to me the feminine cant about the agony of having them and the wear and tear of bringing them up; there are no men present, so we can be quite honest. We know that the woman who goes about bearing and training children intelligently has no great amount of trouble."

"You talk like a traitor to your own sex. If women would stand together——"

"The men are on speaking terms with Viola," was Juliet's disconcerting interruption. "Isn't it the women that trample her? And you know very well, Emma, you'd merely shake your head reprovingly at a man of her sort and say, 'Naughty, naughty,' without really meaning it."

"I wouldn't notice Murdock any more than if he were the dirt under my feet," cried Emma, all aquiver with fury. "And I know you wouldn't either. At heart you are a good woman."

Juliet could not repress the longing that surged up within her—the longing to ease her heart of its secret and to confound her sister. "At heart, I am—just a woman," she said, and there was in her calm an energy that terrified Emma. "Notice him? Why, I *love* him!"

Again Emma stopped short on the crowded sidewalk and stared at her beautiful sister, heedless of the amused spectators. "You don't even know the man!"

"Know him?" Juliet laughed strangely. "Then no human being ever knew another. And in spite of the way he has acted with Viola, I love him, I'd serve him like a dog its master. It's shameful that I have no

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pride. I ought to despise him. Instead, I only love him the more, and despise myself—for being so weak, so womanish, that in the bottom of my heart I don't blame him. A woman feels that she belongs to the man she loves, but she doesn't feel that he belongs to her—though she'd like to."

Emma, looking as if she were about to faint, signaled a cab. "Au Bois," she said or, rather, gasped, to the driver as they seated themselves. At last—at last! She had always felt it in her bones that Juliet would sooner or later listen to the whisperings of the flibbertigibbet, the same imp that had teased her in her own youth to revolt from the docile, rooted fate of our cousins of the vegetable kingdom. No real temptation from without reënforcing those bad, sweet plaguings, she had triumphed over them; and the stronger the nature the more firmly it conforms, once it has been shaped to the mold and cooled there. But Juliet— At last—at last! The wild bird's cage was open! She did not feel equal to speech until they had passed the Arch. Then she said:

"And I have seen nothing of this—suspected nothing!"

"Why should you?" replied Juliet wearily. "Do you suppose I've been wrestling with the world since I was seventeen, without learning to hide my heart and smooth my front, and smile? What if everything did go smash with me? Still, life had to be lived. Thank God, I had my work to turn to! Ladies and gentlemen, with nothing to do but think about their souls, can afford the luxuries of broken lives and despairs and such interesting tragic playthings. But not we working people."

"He is a greater scoundrel than I thought!" exclaimed Emma. "He has betrayed two good women."

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Juliet glanced inquiringly at her sister; as the fullness of Emma's inconsistency came over her she laughed.

"And you can *laugh*!" cried Emma tragically.

"Why not? A heartache doesn't suspend the sense of humor. And your morals are very funny, Emmy."

"Evidently you care nothing for him. You were imply vexing me."

"As you please. Let's talk no more about it."

"I should think not! It's no fit subject for respectable women. Such low people——"

"No more. *Please*—no more," said Juliet. "If I keep on thinking about it I shall go quite mad."

Emma was silenced by the expression of her eyes and mouth. Emma's heart swelled with sympathy; but she did not venture to show it. "She'd think I was pitying her," she said to herself. "Besides, sympathy would encourage her."

XXXVI

VIOLA GIVES THE CLEW

WHEN Viola entered the Raeburn sisters' apartment at noon the next day, she was dressed quietly, for Viola—a toque, a dark-blue walking dress, a silver-fox collar and muff, no jewels but a beauty box, a chain of amethysts and two marquise rings, one on either hand. Juliet received her with burning cheeks and lowered eyes. "Really, no one knows," Viola hastened to explain, knowing nothing that could enlighten her as to the true reason. "Really, Miss Raeburn, I'm only going to bother you a few minutes. I understand."

"Viola," said Juliet, "you mustn't say those things to me."

"Oh, but I saw how you felt. And I don't blame you. I know my class." She tossed her head and tried to look as unconcerned before Juliet as she would before anyone else. "It's quite good enough for me. It takes all kinds to make a world."

"You misunderstood," said Juliet earnestly. "I can't tell you why, but I ought to be apologizing to you. And you must not talk to me about—Mr. Murdock."

Viola was amazed. "How did you know that? Do you know him? Have you seen him? Did he tell you he warned me, before he went away, that I mustn't see any Americans or English?"

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"No, I haven't seen him. But you mustn't talk about him."

"Why, that's what I came for! I can't sleep or eat or anything for fretting about him." She began to cry. Her grief and her account of her sufferings would have been more impressive had she not been obviously in that perfect physical condition which results only from sound sleep and a good appetite.

"He will probably come back, when he can," said Juliet. "He wouldn't have taken you from America with him if he hadn't wanted you."

"Wanted me! Why, he hasn't even kissed me but once. That was the first day—the day I met him at the station. I got a telegram from him. I went there, and he made a scene before everybody. And I thought things were going to be with him and me as they were before——"

Juliet checked her with a sharp: "You mustn't, Viola. I don't wish to hear. I don't wish to know."

Viola was puzzled and amused. "Why, everybody knows," cried she. "So what's the difference? . . . Anyhow, he took me away from the station and treated me— You'd have thought I was the wife he was getting a divorce from. Then he brought me over here, and kept away from me, and left me after a month—less than a month. Lilly—that's my maid—could tell you just when. I never remember dates. And"—she burst out crying—"Oh, I'm so lonely, and I do love him so! He gave me all the money I wanted, and everything." She stopped crying as abruptly as she had begun, and was smiling. "It's too funny."

Juliet was pale and rigid, her hands clasped in her lap. But Viola did not see; her glance, errant as her uttermost thoughts, had lighted upon Juliet's dress.

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"What a beautiful, sweet *matinée* you've got on. I see it's from Callot. I know all the models now. Do you like Callot? I prefer Le Ferriere—this season—though, when it comes to wraps, none of them has the—the swelleness of Paquin. . . . But, I was saying, it's very funny—about him and me. Even when he and I first—first got well acquainted, do you know, it was so queer, he always gave me the feeling that he was imagining I was some other woman. Oh, but he's strange!"

Juliet's eyes were brilliant; her color had returned.

"Men are funny, anyhow," continued Viola. "They're full of all kinds of crazy notions. They're never sensible where women are concerned. And it irritates them to find out how practical we women are. A woman has to pretend not to be human with them. The crazier she acts the better they like it. I've learned just to keep my mouth shut and look; then they think they see it all in my eyes."

Breakfast was announced. Viola protested; Juliet insisted; Viola yielded. As she ate and drank her spirits grew lighter and lighter. "You don't know how lonesome I've been. But my time's nearly up. He said six months; so I can sail two weeks from Wednesday. I promised him to stay, and I've kept my word. I'll find Jessie in a convent. She always was religious, but I never thought it'd be so serious with her while her looks lasted. It just shows you how you never can tell what's going on in people's heads. I guess she loved that horrible Tom Berkeley. Did you know him? No? You may be glad you didn't. He was very different from Mr. Murdock. . . . That's another funny thing. I always—always—called him Mr. Murdock—yes, indeed—always." And she nodded and smiled roguishly at Juliet over the rim of her glass of red wine. "Did you

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ever hear anything so funny? Do you wonder I used to get to thinking about him until I'd be all worked up, and then, as soon as I'd see him it'd be like—like cold storage. Fancy!"

"You say he has gone?"

"Gone!" Viola felt that it was the stage, the romantic drama, in real life, herself the heroine. Play acting—"make believe" as the children call it—is our chief business all our lives. There is the conscious, studied playing of various rôles for various advantages among the educated classes; with them the natural theatrical, imitative instinct has been developed by the reading of literature which accepts as genuine and accentuates as admirable the struttings and posings of mere mortals. And among the educated, "make believe" is carried on with never a grin, like their other solemn frauds of manners and dress and conventionality. But among the simpler beings, those unspoiled by carefully intrained pose and pretense, the staginess is less serious. Viola put on a tragic face and got ready for her "turn"; but she had a sensible eye, alert for signs that Juliet was not impressed. And the signs were obvious. "Yes, gone," she said, lapsing briskly into "every day." "And while he did the handsome thing by me I'm afraid something has happened to him. I don't see his name in the *Herald* as having arrived anywhere. Do you think anything dreadful could have happened to him?"

"No," replied Juliet, giving her an assurance that far from satisfied herself. "If anything had happened, then his bankers—whoever communicates with him—and he would have to keep in touch with somebody, wouldn't he?—they'd have begun an open search."

The good sense of this moved Viola to admiration.

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"What an advantage it is to have brains! Now, if I had thought of that I'd have saved myself many a sleepless—that is, a good deal of worry. You see, having nothing much to do, I've thought about him."

"How long has it been?"

"He left me early in June—no, late in May— He just lifted his hat at the door—he never once was even inside the house, though it's a perfect dream—a beauty——"

"And didn't say where he was going?"

"Just lifted his hat and shook hands and said good-by, as if I were some fashionable lady friend he'd been calling on. He was using me for some purpose, and he was done. That's *my* opinion."

Juliet was gazing past Viola, her eyes wide and strange. Viola stared. "Why, what's the matter, Miss Raeburn!" she exclaimed.

"Nothing—nothing," said Juliet slowly and with difficulty returning to her surroundings. "You say you've been to all the shops. I wonder what you saw that I overlooked." And they plunged into discussion of fall styles, winter styles, hats, dresses, wraps, furs. Viola talked well, so well that Juliet presently interrupted with, "It's a shame your talent shouldn't be used. Why don't you settle down and go into business?"

Viola instantly became uneasy; her self-consciousness had returned—the memory of what she was. "Oh—you know. I'm 'out of it'."

"Do you like what you're doing?"

"I do and I don't. Now that *he* has given me an income— I didn't tell you about that. He told me I'd done him a great service, though I can't see *it*, and he said he owed it to me. Anyhow, I've got

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it. It's where I can't blow it in. I'll not have to worry any more, or put up with—with things I don't like."

"Did you ever think you'd like to have a home and—a baby?"

"Never!" exclaimed Viola. "No, I was born to be free, and to roam about. I hate to be respectable—church, Sunday school, prayer meeting, not go out after supper— O Lord! it gives me the horrors to think of Sunday at our house— I had to be all that till I was sixteen. Then I—scooted! . . . If it wasn't for getting old—" Viola shivered, but it was a summer shiver at thought of winter. "Still, that's a long ways off yet. Please don't preach!"

"I wasn't going to preach."

"But you *are* preaching. It's in your eyes."

"No, no," Juliet protested. "I'd like to, but somehow the things that are usually said on such occasions seem not to fit."

"That's it—they don't fit. I'm happy. Why should I change? I don't hanker after respectability. I've got no brains for anything useful——"

"I could make a place for you—a good place."

"You wouldn't have me about."

"Indeed I would."

"But you know—what kind I am."

"Business people don't bother about those things in business."

When Viola rose to go she returned to the subject, and her manner showed that it was attracting her. "About your offer," said she shyly: "If you had me around, respectable people would shun Dangerfield's."

"I'm assuming you'd have enough regard for me to cause no scandal."

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"You'd *really* have me?"

"I want you. I need you," replied the head of Gerfield's. "I'd agree to make you chief foreign if you'd agree not to—to set the rest of us example."

"You'd *really* have me?"

"Really. If you ever get tired of your line, come round and talk it over. You'd live over most of the year."

Viola looked at her wistfully. "If I only had spark of the lady in me or of longing to be a lady. I haven't. I'm a born—what the men call me w make them angry."

"Don't take yourself so seriously," advised . "You'll come out all right. You'll sow your wil —get even for those dreary Sundays after a and want to do something permanently intere Then——"

"I wonder," mused Viola. "You make me I'm not such a fool, after all." She blushed, said humble hesitation, "Would you mind if I—kissed y

"I'd like it!" exclaimed Juliet, and proceed kiss her heartily. "Good luck! I believe I could t out with a job that would interest you more than thing you ever did in your life."

"I may astonish you by turning up."

A safe quarter of an hour after Viola left, came into the salon, first taking a thorough preca ary look round. "The man said she had gone." sniffed the air and made a wry face.

"What hypocrisy!" said Juliet impatiently. uses the same perfume I do."

"But it smells different on her."

Juliet went into her dressing room, returned

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hat and gloves. "I'm going out," she said. "I may not be back until late."

"With *her*?"

Juliet gave a queer laugh. "Worse than that—much worse."

Her expression was so strange that Emma went into panic. "I know you will do nothing unwomanly," said she, her agitation betraying that the words, as those words usually do, meant precisely the reverse.

"Nothing unwomanly, I assure you."

Juliet's accent upon the unwomanly confirmed her sister in dread. "Juliet, I do not trust you!" she cried. "No woman is to be trusted where a man is concerned, and no man where a woman is concerned."

"I should hope not. What a dull world it would be if it weren't so—and how little *you'd* have to interfere with you."

With that she departed, leaving deepening anxiety in her mind. For the longer Emma revolved Juliet's astounding confession about Murdock the more convinced she was that the long-dreaded crisis had come. The crisis she had been expecting ever since Juliet at once suddenly transformed from an awkward, not especially pretty though unusual chatterbox of a girl to a beautiful woman, willful, whimsical, impatient of restraint and monotony, contemptuous of conventionalities which are law and testament to most human beings. To a woman no man could look at unmoved was certain this day to meet the man who would move her. Then what? "He will certainly be an improper person," Emma had always thought. "Good, sober, regular men do not attract her. She imagines she thinks them either hypocrites, suppressing their natural selves, or cowards. She dare not be what they long to be. She has utterly

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false and perverted notions of human nature. She is absolutely irresponsible. A wild bird—" Emma wrung her hands—" and the cage door is open at last."

At her bankers, Juliet got a list of all the banks in Paris that did direct business with America. She went to each, and said to the mail clerk: "I wish to leave letter here for Mr. Murdock." As she said it she watched the clerk's face narrowly. But at none of the banks did he give any indication of knowledge of Murdock. She was certain that if any of them were in the habit of receiving mail for him she would have seen it. Discouraged, she returned to her own bank to ask the clerk there whether he had not omitted some one banker. When her cab reached the curb a cab ahead was just driving away; something in the air of the occupant made her look again. It was Simcox.

"Follow that fiacre," said she to her cabman, "and don't lose sight of it. A louis beside your fare."

"Parfaitement, madame. He shall not escape."

XXXVII

"DO YOU NO LONGER CARE?"

At that farewell drive with Viola, Murdock, to his hotel, told Simcox to pack certain of things into a small box and a bag, both new and old. "Send the rest to storage. I'm going away. Here is a check. That will give you a chance about."

"Very well, sir," said Simcox. His wrinkled leatherness expressed normally the last degree of despair; so the only changes to which it could give were toward a lightening of the gloom. As this was an occasion for such a change he remained impassive.

"Here is the check," repeated Murdock, holding it

out, sir." But Simcox made no move to take it. "What's the matter?" asked Murdock impatiently. "He would now set the hot bubbles of causeless boiling in his blood."

"Dazed, sir—taken aback like. I was trying to

Murdock put the check on the table in the center of the desk and seated himself at the desk and resumed tearing at the papers.

"Pardon, sir," interrupted Simcox's respectful

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Murdock frowned, turned abruptly. "What! Still standing there?"

"Yes, sir. I've been thinking."

"Well?"

"I haven't got anybody but you, sir, and you've got to have somebody to take care of you. I'll never forget what a state you was in when I first came to you. And—I don't want to go back to my drinking, Mr. Murdock. But I surely will if I get lonesome again. It's lonesomeness that leads to drink."

Murdock reddened; he had been drinking heavily of late, because it benumbed his nerves. "I don't know just what I'm going to do with myself, Simcox," said he. "You wouldn't care to knock about as I probably shall."

"One place is just the same as another to me, sir. I'm like a dog—all I want is my master and my meals."

Murdock averted his face abruptly. So there was somebody in the world who cared for him—somebody who put him first. The irony of it! He, envied probably by those who were taking advantage of his silence and absence to denounce him—he, with so much that the world most esteems—he, ever more and more solitary and lonely, as his wealth and his power grew—he, now with but one friend left, and that one a dependent, a valet, without ambition enough to be disloyal and scheme to use his master for his own advancement. He turned in his chair and surveyed the ungainly, common figure and face. As he looked, his eyes softened to the blue gray that changed the whole character of his features, took away relentlessness and hardness, and reflected the best of his generous, human heart. In the whole world, how many of those living and dying, fancying they were surrounded by friends—how many could, if the real test

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came, show one single human friend as faithful as the meanest dog would be as a matter of course? "Why, I'm rich!" said Murdock to himself, gazing at the stooped, slouching figure of Simcox. "Rich! I've got a real friend!"

"There ain't no reason why you should cast me adrift, is there now?" urged Simcox, funereal and monotonous.

"Stay if you like," said Murdock gruffly.

Their eyes met for an instant, and each understood the other. "Thank you, sir," said Simcox. He tore up the check without having looked at it, and went about his duties.

That was indeed a nomad summer. Murdock's life, with all its purposes and activities blighted, had become a desert; and he was lost in it, was using his tremendous energy in furious, futile efforts to escape. The ever-increasing crowd of human beings who roam restlessly up and down the earth and to and fro therein contains not a few of these lost ones. They stand out, distinct as Wandering Jew in caravan of Christian pilgrims, from those seeking knowledge or satisfying curiosity or trying to stifle boredom's yawns. They are the men and women who have lost caste or reputation or love or hope, yet for one reason or another do not put the sure quietus upon their torment; they fly from place to place, in their eyes the look of the damned in hell; they hasten, pause, hasten on again, rush forward, wheel, and rapidly retrace their steps. They drink and suddenly abandon drink; they gamble madly, then fly from the tables to return no more; they wind in and out of concourses for pleasure; they rush eagerly into sensuality, only to quit the glittering banquet table, impelled by sudden nausea. And all the while, their torment utters no word or ges-

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ture; for the real tragedies are dumb, having no longing to attract the sympathy or pity for which outward signs of woe are the signals. Life has ceased to be a theatrical performance, has become a horrible reality. The hours cease to fly, the years to revolve; eternity becomes a present fact, and each moment gives the pendulum ample time to swing through an infinite arc.

"What day is it?"—What time is it?"—these were the questions that made up most of Murdock's conversation with Simcox. And he always heard Simcox's answer with the same stern frown. In August, he turned back from the wilds of the Balkans to speed across Europe in automobile; travel in any other way had become monotonously tedious. He embarked at Liverpool, still under an assumed name, but got off at Queens-town and dashed back across Ireland and England to the Continent. He lay in a drunken stupor many days at the Bristol in Vienna, roused himself, fled to Switzerland, recklessly ascended several dangerous peaks; with a sprained ankle, which his restlessness would not permit to heal, he had himself motored down through France to the Pyrenees, to Madrid, to Gibraltar, back again, going night and day, to Paris; and there, in late September, he hid in an apartment in the Boulevard St. Germain, sinking down in a torpor.

Through all those wanderings and hardships he suffered little physical change. The same force that was benumbing his mind seemed to preserve his body intact. His strong, rather grim but distinctly youthful face, bronzed by exposure, showed no traces of what was going on within, except in the eyes; they seemed to burn, as if he had a high fever and were on the verge of delirium. Simcox brought him the mail every steamer day—great bundles of it, and cablegrams. But he simply

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glanced at the envelopes or at the code messages, with no desire to penetrate further; it was news from a world which he no longer inhabited and which no longer interested him. Simcox put before him a photograph of Norma's boy. He stared at it, let it fall to the floor, forgot it.

"Seems like he can't neither die nor live," said the valet. And he gave many an hour to revolving plans—without getting anywhere—for his master's cure. As he drove away from the one bank at which Juliet had not thought to inquire—her own—he saw her following. But he did not change his order to the coachman. The two cabs crossed the Pont Alexandre III, one close behind the other, Juliet taking care to keep the coachman's broad, sedentary back between her and Simcox's range of vision. Simcox descended at Murdock's apartment, sent away his cab; with the big bag of mail beside him on the curb he waited for Juliet to drive up. She looked disconcerted, but his expression reassured her. When she was facing him on the sidewalk he touched his hat and said, "Do you wish to see him, ma'am?"

"Yes, Simcox."

"Very well, ma'am. I'll take you to him."

They entered the house, ascended to the second floor. He opened one of the great double doors of Murdock's apartment, motioned her into a seat in the hall. "Wait here," said he. After about ten minutes he returned, explaining: "He don't know anybody's come. He's sitting in the salon, there."

She silently put out her hand. Simcox touched it respectfully. "God bless you, ma'am," he murmured. She drew aside the curtain just enough to permit her to enter. The lofty room, all white and gilt and mir-

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rored, was in twilight; a wood fire blazed cheerfully in the far corner. Before it, staring at the quiet, softly brilliant flames, sat Murdock, a cigar between the fingers of one hand that hung listlessly over the arm of the chair.

"Murdock!" she said gently.

The figure did not move.

"Murdock," she repeated in the same soft undertone.

Still no movement. She advanced toward him; the frou frou of her skirts, though faint, sounded very distinct in that stillness. She had bared her hand; she just rested the tips of her fingers upon his thick, crisp hair. He stirred uneasily. She went round, stood before him, one side of her in the semidarkness; the other in the rich golden light of the blaze. Very sweet and slender and alluring she looked; and her small, oval face, with its halo of waving pompadour crowned by a hat as graceful as a cloud line, irradiated the love and longing that beat in every pulse of her blood. His gaze slowly traveled up her figure until it met hers. At first he seemed not to see, then not to believe his sight. Then there leaped into his eyes such a look that she cried out with joy—"Ah! Murdock! Murdock!"

He rose; but, instead of advancing toward her, he stood with the great chair between them. He looked cold and calm now. He bowed slightly. "You are lingering in Paris late this year," he said in formal tones.

She was thrust back, confused for the moment. She showed it by saying, formal as he, "I always stay late, because the best models aren't shown until the dress-makers and the tourists have left."

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He moved toward the bell rope. "Perhaps you will have tea."

"Thanks," she murmured. She felt as if she were facing an utter stranger; and beforehand she had thought there might possibly be any kind of barrier between them except one of ice. He arranged a chair at the fire for her. Simcox came with the tea, drew a small table to her side, set the tray upon it, departed.

"How will you have yours?" she asked.

"As it may happen—strong—or weak—it does not matter."

He took the cup, set it on the tobacco stand at his elbow. She had been warm; she now felt as if she were about to have a chill—a nervous chill. She could think of nothing to say; there seemed to be nothing to say. And he sat there, rigid, his face unrelaxing; he not only did not speak, but also froze her from power to speak. Yet speak she must. "We—my sister and I—are sailing next week."

"Yes?" he said politely, and his eyes rested coldly on her for an instant.

"You are making it terribly hard for me," she cried in desperation. "But I *will* say what I came to say."

He looked at her in an attitude of listening and waiting—the courtesy of host to unwelcome guest who must yet be treated with politeness.

"I came to ask you to forgive me for having doubted you—and deserted you. I should have understood. But— . . . I was—jealous."

"All that belongs to yesterday—a dead and buried yesterday." He made a motion to rise—a hint that the interview was at an end.

But she did not rise. She leaned toward him and

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her eyes searched his. "Murdock," she said, "do you no longer care for me?"

He was silent—the silence that seems charitably to withhold an unpleasant truth.

"I suppose not," she said with a weary sigh. "I should have forgiven *you* anything. But that's no reason why you should forgive me, is it? It killed your love to find out I was not what you thought, that I did not take my stand beside you, when they were trying to destroy you with their hypocritical scorn."

He shrugged indifferently. "It's fortunate you acted as you did," said he. "If you had indulged in any such theatricals, we should both have been lynched."

"Still, I ought to have come. I've hated myself ever since I found out to-day that you took Viola to shield me. You were thinking of me, and I—" She made a gesture of disdain— "I was groveling in jealousy. What a frightful thing an imagination is! I could see her in your arms—and, God, how I loved you!"

He bit his lip and frowned.

"Pardon me," she said hastily. "I didn't mean to refer to that again. All I wished was to let you know that at least I wasn't a coward."

He again shrugged his shoulders. "What does it matter?"

"What, indeed? But when I came here, I hoped it would. And the way you looked when you saw me— But that was because you forgot for the instant how unworthy I had shown myself. . . . You see, I do love you, Murdock, and I want you. I think I developed, *became* a woman, unusually early. I can't remember when I wasn't dreaming of the man I'd some day love

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and give myself to. Then—up there in the wilderness I met—you."

She paused, leaned her elbow upon the table, like him gazed into the flames.

"You were right," she went on, her voice low and quiet and sweet as distant music. "I did love you from that time you caught me in your arms to save me from the whirlpool. . . . Do you remember the day we shot the rapids in the canoe—you kneeling in front of me, I steadying myself by holding to you? How the river boiled and hissed!—and the smooth green water on every side, and the great oily whirlpools crawling out toward our boat to suck it down to destruction if you let the prow vary by so much as an inch in that angry white streak in the center of the river. . . . Do you remember?"

Was it the firelight flickering on his face or was it lights and shadows from within?

"You loved me then! Is it all dead—dead forever?"

He was leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his fascinated gaze upon the fire.

"I came to-day to be to you whatever you wish. I thought, 'If he cannot forgive and respect and love me, still perhaps he will let me love him.' For, my soul, my body, cry out for you without ceasing. I should have become worn and ugly, I think, if I had not been always thinking I must keep what looks I had for the time when— You see, I have no pride; no woman has, when she loves. Yes, I was waiting for the time when you would grow tired of—of Viola—and might perhaps turn to me. I've never got a dress or a hat that I've not said, 'Will he fancy me in this, if by chance he should come when I have it on?' And

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when I saw Viola on the street yesterday, saw you were not with her, my heart leaped, for I began to hope you had wearied of her."

He started up. "Stop!" he cried fiercely. "Stop!"

Her bosom was heaving stormily and she was sobbing, but her eyes were tearless. She flung herself at his feet. "Then, let me stay as a servant. I'll never be jealous again—at least, you'll never see it. I must stay near you. I'll not trouble you. If you send me away—you'd be kinder if you killed me."

He sank into his chair, buried his face in his hands. Presently she put out her arm, timidly touched him; and when he did not draw away, she nestled against his knees. She flung off her hat; her hair, escaping in strays, waved about her face, and her eyes blazed passionately up at him. "Ah, you do love me," she said softly, and her voice was like the murmur of a tigress under the caresses of her mate.

"You must go," he insisted. "I have destroyed myself. But I will not destroy you. Nor shall I let you destroy yourself. My life's in ruins—I ruined it. I am an outcast. But I will wander alone." He took her small, oval face between his hands. "Love you?" he cried. "I love you so that if I should put my arms about you I would crush you——"

She straightened herself on her knees, her eyes flashing, her nostrils quivering. "Crush me! I'll not cry out, unless it is with joy. I love you, Murdock, as they love in the forest where we were at home."

"Go back to your reputation. To-morrow you will hate me."

"If I were a man—yes. It is you men who cower before opinion. But not women—not real women."

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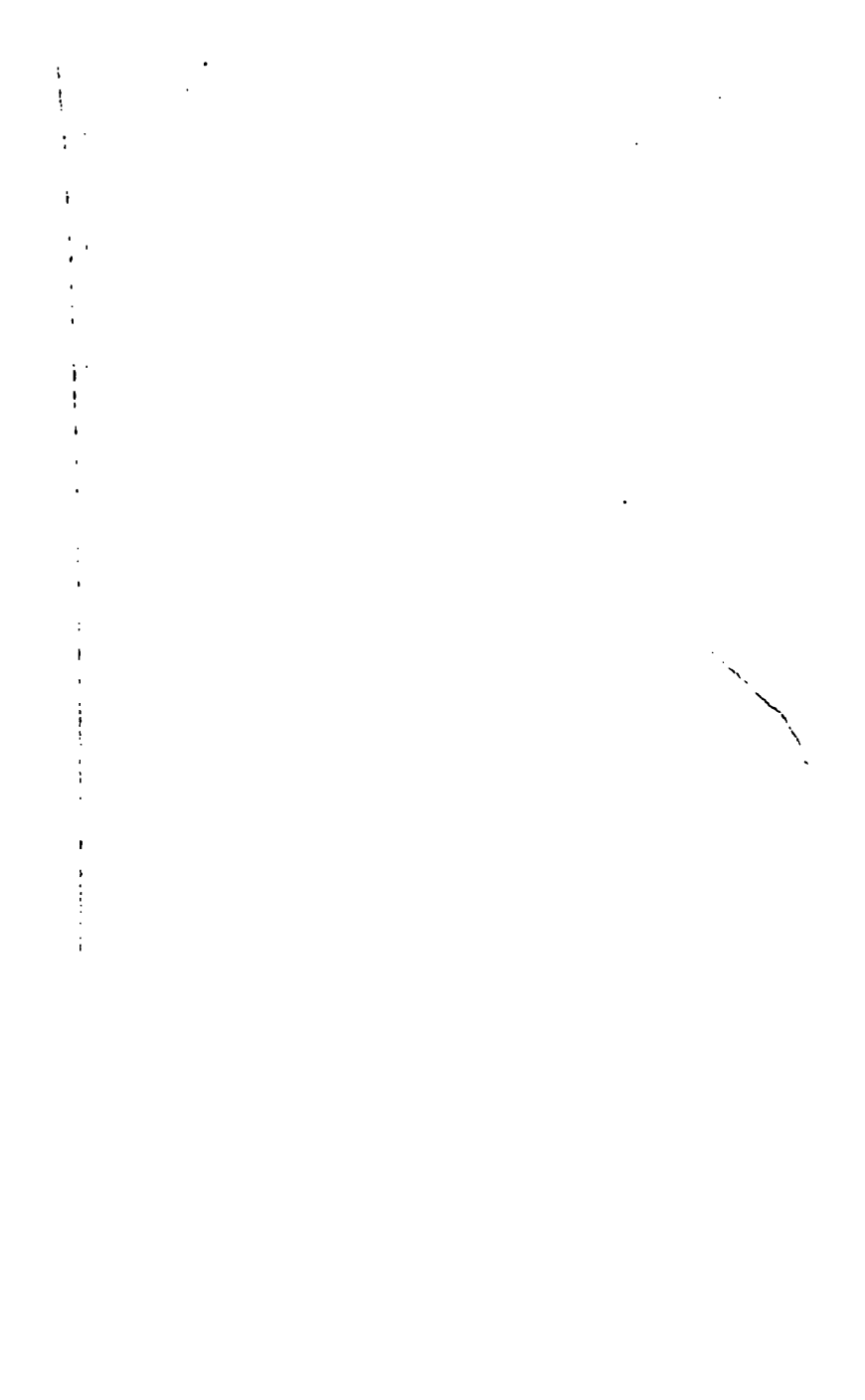
When a real woman finds her master, she follows him. And his approval is her honor, his frown her dishonor.”

“You are mad!” And then she was in his arms. “We are both mad!”

“Yes—yes,” she gasped, her fingers biting into his shoulders, and her face upturned to his with eyes wide like an eagle’s to the blaze of the sun. “Mad—quite mad. Do we not love each other? You are angel and devil, both in one. And—I adore you!”

(3)

THE END



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